Guitar MAGAZINE

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DOES FENDER'S **AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II SERIES** SET A NEW STANDARD?

GEAR OF THE YEAR

YOUR GUIDE TO THE **BEST OF 2020**

REVIEWED

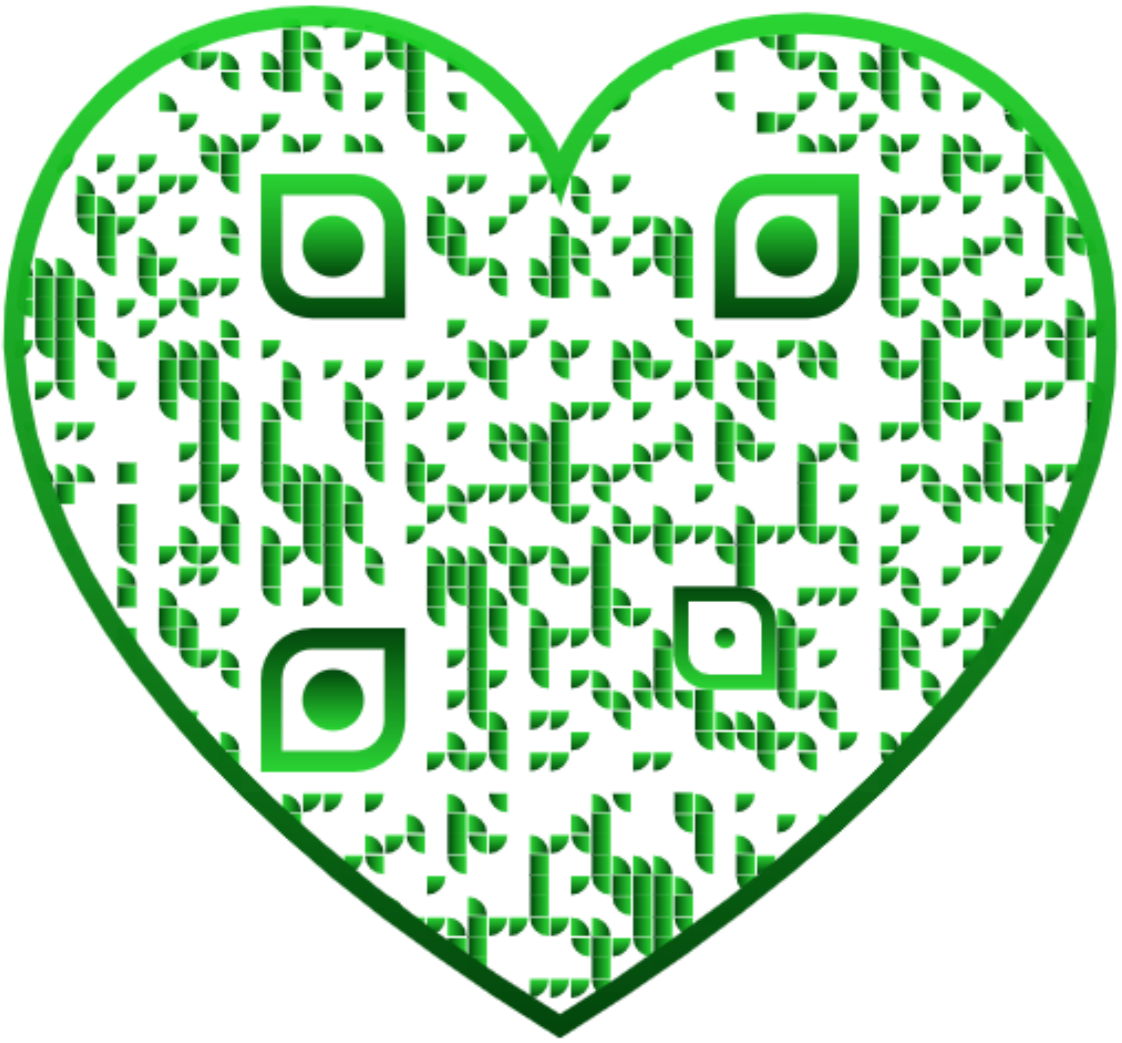
STRYMON NIGHTSKY
FRACTAL AUDIO FM3
NOVO SOLUS F1

FEATURED

GRAHAM COXON
MARTY FRIEDMAN
LITTLE BARRIE

PLUS

JOHN LENNON
& GARY MOORE
GUITAR LESSONS



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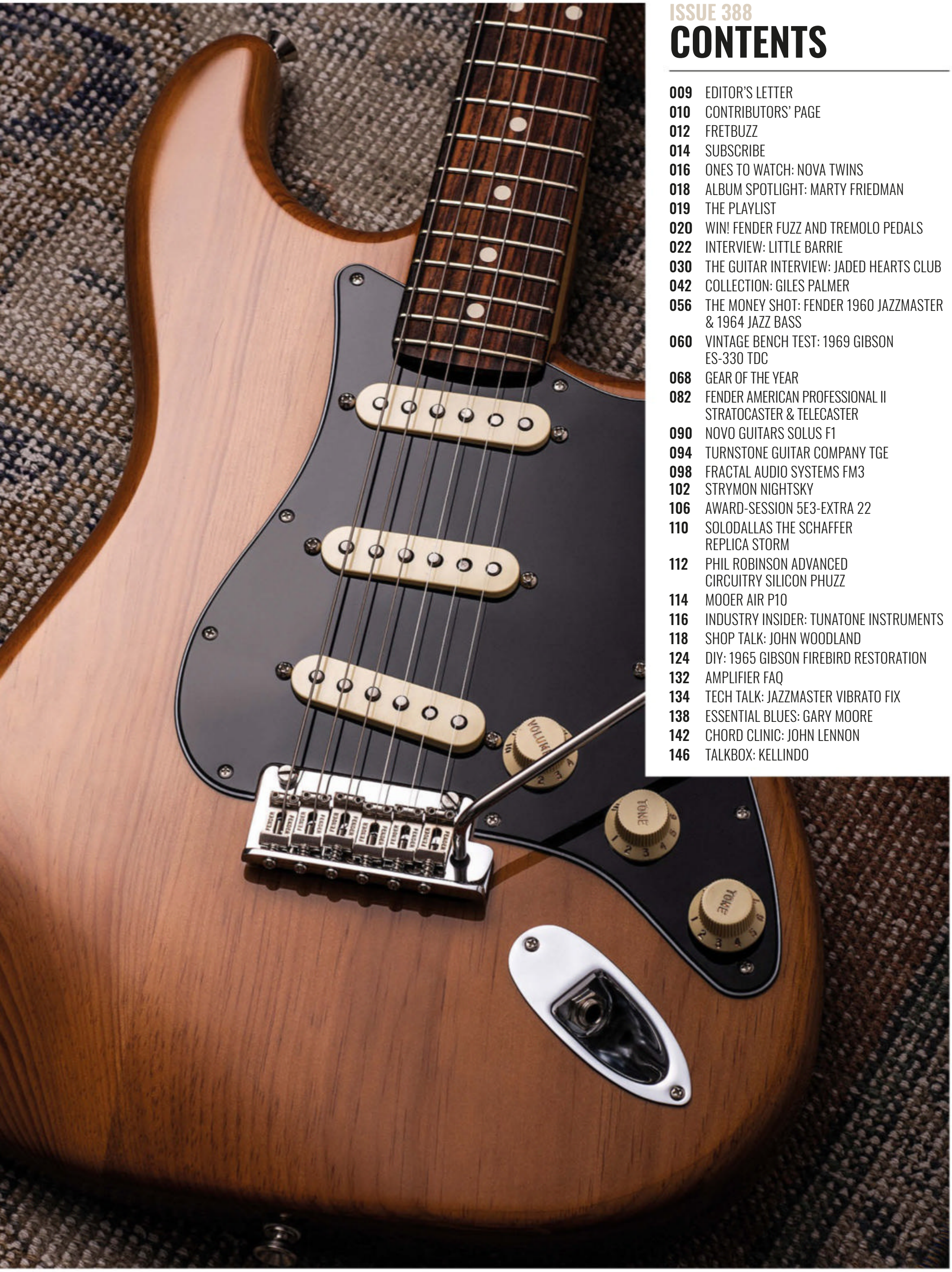
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EDITOR'S LETTER

AWARDS SEASON

As this very strange year speeds towards its end, it's time for our annual celebration of the past 12 months in guitar gear. You voted in your thousands for the best products of 2020 and the results of the second most talked-about election of the year can be found from p68 onwards. If you're planning on splashing out on a new toy in the coming weeks, be sure to read this essential buyer's guide first.

The various lockdown restrictions most of us have endured this year have only served to accelerate a move towards direct recording, home-friendly amps and online collaboration. We've had to adapt to different ways of making music and, even when live shows return in earnest, some of the new habits we've picked up are likely to stick.

Personally, I've found that recording direct with a Universal Audio Ox delivers more satisfying results than many of the more old-school recording methods I've used in studios over the years. The tone-sculpting flexibility and sheer control isn't something I'd want to lose, it's considerably cheaper than paying for every tick of the studio clock *and* you can guarantee that you'll get a decent cup of tea. That said, the handful of occasions on which I've performed live with other humans this year have been precious experiences and I cannot wait for that crackle of electricity to be a normal part of life again. I'm sure many of you feel the same way.

What will 2021 bring in terms of new gear? We'll take a deep dive into that subject next month. But it seems inevitable that gallons of R&D perspiration are currently being expended in an effort to provide us with even more amazing ways for the guitar to dovetail with cutting-edge tech and modern life, all the while preserving the essential organic qualities that, other than the human voice, make our chosen musical instrument the most expressive and emotive of all. Have a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year – I'll see you in 2021.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

This issue, as we look back at the gear of the year just gone and prepare for what's hopefully a merciful 2021, we also go in search of silver linings as we ask some of our contributors about their best buys during a troublesome 2020

DAVE HUNTER

STATESIDE CORRESPONDENT

A founding member of the band Drugstore in the early 1990s, US writer and guitarist Dave later left the musician's life for a day job in journalism. In 2020, he added a used 2014 Fender Custom Shop 40th Anniversary 1954 Stratocaster to his collection, ending his Strat search – "hopefully for good". For this issue, Dave spoke to John Woodland of Mastery Bridge and was stunned by his devotion to the instrument. "Totally next-level stuff in the realm of respecting design traditions while pushing the art forward." We'll say. Head to p118 to read all about it.

ED OLESZKO

FACTORY FOREMAN

A roadworn guitarist with more than 20 years of experience, Ed is one half of YouTube's Tone Twins TV, and runs boutique recording studio Vintage Tone Factory. In 2020, he added to the studio's gear with a 1954 Fender Esquire and a 1968 Marshall Plexi Super Bass. For this issue, Ed got to grips with SoloDallas's Angus-in-a-box Storm pedal. Testing it with the '68 Plexi pushed his soundproofing to its limits. "Talk about thunder-struck," he says. "Luckily the neighbours don't shoot to kill!" Turn to p111 to find out more.

HUW PRICE

VINTAGE AFICIONADO

In a former life, Huw was a successful studio engineer who worked with artists such as Nick Cave, Primal Scream and David Bowie. These days, when he's not pulling apart and renovating vintage gear, he's buying it. In 2020, craving some British crunch, he added a mid-1960s WEM Westminster MkII amp to his already impressive collection. "These point-to-point amps are affordable classics and sound sublime with any guitar," he says. Flick to p124 to read part one of Huw's 1965 Non-Reverse Firebird restoration project.

RICHARD PURVIS

STOMPBOX ADDICT

Alongside his 'proper' jobs in journalism, Richard has gigged as a guitarist, bassist and drummer (not all at the same time), and has produced music for TV. His most essential gear purchase of 2020 came following his analysis of ThorpyFX's Field Marshal for our October issue. "I was on the phone to Adrian with my debit card 10 minutes after filing the review," he says. Did Strymon's NightSky inspire the same get-up-and-go? Go to p112 to find out. "How often would I use ultra-lush sounds like this? Never. But testing this pedal was a huge amount of fun".

SAM ROBERTS

BEACH BOYS FANATIC

Our associate editor Sam began his playing career with a starter-pack Aria S-type but has since graduated to grander gear, with his Surf Green Jaguar now the star of the show. In 2020, he bolstered his setup with a JHS Twin Twelve stompbox. "I could never part with my '68 Selmer Treble & Bass," he says. "But the Twin Twelve is one of my dream amps – and this gets me as close as I can to that gnarly overdriven sound." This issue, we sent him on a Canadian fishing trip to meet the founder of TunaTone. Check out her hand-built short-scale guitars on p116.

MICHAEL WATTS

SHARP-DRESSED MAN

An award-winning acoustic guitarist, Michael has spent years at the bleeding edge of bespoke luthier-built guitars, as evidenced by his itinerant Luthier Stories YouTube series. In 2020, however, with lockdowns keeping him from travelling the world, Michael upgraded his video setup with lights and a new camera instead. "Worth every penny!" He also snared a few new pedals too, including a Phil Robinson fuzz. Flip to p112 to see what he thinks of it (spoiler: he's delighted) and be sure to read his Jaded Hearts Club interview on p30.

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Matt's Super Bass had sat untouched for 25 years

GARAGE ROCK

Hi, *Guitar* team. I have a pretty cool story to share that I thought might be of interest to you and your readers. I recently came across an honest-to-goodness, all-original 1971 Marshall 100-watt Super Bass that had been sitting untouched in a garage for more than two decades. The amp's original owner had passed away and I learnt that the amp had been stored in his attic for many years before being moved into the garage about 25 years ago, where it remained until eventually I bought it.

The owner's son had decided to sell his dad's house having rented it out for many years and, in the process of cleaning out the garage, came across the Super Bass, where it had remained untouched for a quarter of a century. He listed the amp for sale online and I was lucky enough to come across it within about 10 minutes of it being posted. After that, I jumped in the car and made the 11-hour round trip from Maryland to New York to pick it up. It was totally worth it though. I became the new custodian of the Marshall 17 years to the day since its original owner had passed away.

The original owner's son was also kind enough to share with me some photographs of the amplifier being used as part of a live band setup back in the 1970s. I wanted to share my stroke of luck with you to demonstrate that it's still possible to discover genuine barn-find vintage gems if you look hard enough.

MATT FISHER, VIA EMAIL

ROARING TWENTIES

Hello there. I'm still drooling over Bernie Marsden's collection that you featured last month! That said, while punters like me can't usually compete with guitar gods in terms of chops or gear, I do think I own a guitar that can go toe to toe with one of the guitars that Bernie showcased. In fact, I'll dare to declare that my 1920 Martin 1-18 is just as special as his 1920 Martin 1-21 – even if I don't have a letter of endorsement from Martin like he does! Now, if I could only just pick it half as well as him…

WERNER KEHL, VIA EMAIL

Werner's 1920 Martin 1-18 is a thing of beauty

SLOWHAND CLAP

Hello. I wanted to say that I enjoyed reading your article on Eric Clapton's best guitar moments on *Guitar.com*. I was pleased to see the author, Owen Bailey, pick up on *Go Back Home*, which is always overlooked. Here are some more outstanding but often forgotten Clapton performances:

1. Billy Preston – *That's The Way God Planned It* (*That's The Way God Planned It*)
2. Plastic Ono Band – *Blue Suede Shoes*, *Money*, *Dizzy Miss Lizzie* and *Yer Blues* (*Live Peace In Toronto 1969*)
3. Carl Perkins and Friends – *Matchbox*, *Honey Don't* and *Mean Woman Blues* (*Blue Suede Shoes: A Rockabilly Session*)
4. Howlin' Wolf – *Rockin' Daddy* and *I Ain't Superstitious* (*The London Howlin Wolf Sessions*)
5. Delaney & Bonnie & Friends – *I Don't Want To Discuss It* (*On Tour With Eric Clapton*)
6. Eric Clapton – *Slunky* (*Eric Clapton*)
7. Cream – *Sweet Wine* (*Fresh Cream*)
8. George Harrison – *Wah-Wah* (*All Things Must Pass*)

Of course, there are many more. But I just thought I would share these little-heard treats with the world!

RUSSELL GONTAR, VIA EMAIL

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"WE SEE YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOUR AT OUR SHOWS, SOMETIMES THEY'RE LIKE 10 YEARS OLD AND THEIR PARENTS BRING THEM. THOSE SHOWS WE PLAY EVEN HARDER"

ONES TO WATCH

NOVA TWINS

WORDS EMMA WILKES

Meet the genre-smashing two-piece giving a shot in the arm to the heavy scene, who absolutely will not tell you what's on their pedalboards…

Georgia South (left) with her Westone bass, and guitarist Amy Love with her P-90-loaded Mustang

Guitar music has not always been the most welcoming space for women of colour, and that's equally true for the heavy scene. All that makes London-based two-piece Nova Twins an overdue dose of something different, both demographically and sonically. Vocalist and guitarist Amy Love and bassist Georgia South deliver a fresh, genre-bending sound that fuses punk, nu-metal, hip-hop and electronica, all forged without the use of synths. We catch up with Amy and Georgia to discuss their musical upbringings, their top-secret pedalboards and the importance of working with brands that reflect their values.

Your music features a lot of electronic sounds but they're not created using synths. What do you use?

Amy: "We wanted to record as a three-piece [including live drummer Tim Nugent], without introducing any other layers unless they were from our instruments. Sometimes our music sounds electronic but we wanted to try and achieve that with real instruments so that we can still do it as a three-piece live, without having to add backing tracks."

Georgia: "The more we did shows, the more we wanted to push ourselves. We thought, 'If we can do this live already, why would we add other synths?' Most people would layer stuff up with synths but we wanted more of a challenge."

So how do you make the sounds?

G: "We both have two massive pedalboards but we don't tell people what they are! Throughout the set, I'm tap-dancing on the pedals!"

A: "We use Fender and Marshall, as well as Gallien-Krueger amps – we can give away our amps. I'm currently playing a Fender Mustang with P-90 pickups."

G: "I play a Westone but I love my new [Fender] P-Bass too. On the album, I played the Westone."

You mentioned on Instagram that you work with Fender because of how well it reflects your values. Can you tell us more about that?

A: "During the Black Lives Matter movement, we wanted to represent brands that wanted to represent us. It was about big brands using their platforms and stating that they don't condone racism. It's as simple as that. I was a bit disappointed in my previous guitar brand. I don't want to name or shame any brands because ultimately, it was just a personal choice. I'm happy with Fender; I can see that they're trying to reach out to different types of artists and different voices. I think there's a problem with a lot of big guitar brands predominantly advertising to old white men. I like that Fender are trying to bring up the new generation and open music up to diversity. I think that's what brands should be doing right now."

What initially inspired you to pick up a guitar?

G: "I started on piano when I was really young. When I was in my early teens, I guess I just wanted something a bit more loud and bold. I always loved the way the bass sat in songs and how it rumbles through your chest."

A: "For me, the guitar came a bit later on. Georgia's dad plays every single instrument and he encouraged us to play too. He was like, 'If you want to express your ideas, it's best to learn [guitar] yourself. Pick it up, lock yourself away, learn it, because you're the person who will express your ideas best.' It was quite gruelling, as it is whenever you learn something new. As I got used to it though, I started to fall in love."

You've touched on what you want to represent in terms of diversity. What was it like getting your start making music in a world where there aren't many visible women of colour out there?

G: "We didn't often find anyone that looked like us on festival bills. We thought, 'This audience probably hasn't seen a band like us'. We knew that we had this responsibility to represent every person of colour in an alternative band that nobody seems to know about, and represent them on these massive stages. It gave us more fuel to just slay it. There's no other option. We rehearse hard. We bring it 100 per cent. If we're tired, we just fight through it because we have that responsibility to represent people."

A: "It was eye-opening, because it's quite sad to think that there are lots of young non-male acts out there who feel like they don't fit in the rock world. It's such a shame. But I think the tables are starting to turn. We're not there yet obviously but it's nice to see brands and other big bands trying to push that movement forward. No matter what you look like, you should have options."

What are your ultimate ambitions as a band?

A: "To continue what we're doing but keep pushing boundaries. We want to be a part of the movement that creates change. Maybe we'll bring up other bands like other bands have for us."

G: "We see young women of colour at our shows, sometimes they're like 10 years old and their parents bring them. Those shows we play even harder. It would be great to inspire them."

Nova Twins' debut LP *Who Are the Girls?* is out now

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

MARTY FRIEDMAN
TOKYO JUKEBOX 3

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The follow-up to 2017's *Wall Of Sound* sees the progressive guitar player return to his love of reimagining Japanese pop and dance tracks

Marty Friedman is one of the most revered metal guitarists of his generation but on his 17th solo LP *Tokyo Jukebox 3*, the Maryland native felt he had to redefine his sound, believing that he'd "completely exhausted" his playing resources and abilities. Here, he details his favourite guitar parts on the new record and tells us how they were formed, from stumbling upon "hidden spices" to deliberately holding back on the delay and reverb.

MAKENAIDE

"At 1:41 on this track, I do something that I've only recently begun doing on my albums, which is coming up with a long line, a barrage of notes following several chords and connecting many phrases, and then having a piano double my guitar line in unison. It's a pretty effective weapon. It adds a sharp point to all the notes, making them sound a bit more urgent and aggressive than they would if the guitar was just playing the line by itself. It's one of the hidden spices I've stumbled upon after playing for so long."

GURENGE

"On *Gurenge*, there's a phrase in the main ad-lib solo that I didn't really think much about other than knowing that I liked it. But the members in my fan group picked up on it and thought it was really special. I believe what they liked about it was the many quick interval jumps. Interval jumps are a brilliant way to make anything more interesting. They don't even really have to be deeply thought out, because the effect you are going for is an unusual distance between notes, so anything works as long as it's played smoothly and the line sounds relatively listenable."

KAZE GA FUITEIRU

"There's another kind of interval jump on this track, with this one on one string, and it's quite effective. I just play a short phrase in one octave after the other. The phrase slightly differs to follow the chords beneath but it's basically the same phrase. It's just a silly little thing I blurted out as I was improvising. I noticed it was cool when I had to relearn it to perform the song live. Since it's a melodic statement, it has to be played properly and that full-neck octave jump is kind of tricky. You have to use your eyes to plan in advance where your fingers are going to go."

SHUKUMEI

"Here, I'm doing the same piano unison thing as I am on *Makenaide*, only this time it's a more complex line. I'm also trying to keep the listener involved by overdubbing the main melody of the song behind this ultra-progressive line. This was one of those things that was relatively easy on guitar but difficult on piano. It's tricky to play parts that were created on other instruments."

SENBONZAKURA

"Many people have commented on the guitar tone on this album being a bit different than it is on my other albums. This time, in many cases, I deliberately kept the wetness from the reverb and delay to a minimum. For the whole album, I was using the Marty Friedman signature-model triumvirate, which I'm so honoured to have – that's my Jackson MF-1 guitar, the ENGL Inferno amp and my signature model EMG pickups. These signature models have gone through so much rigorous development that it's a very powerful feeling to use all three at the same time and get this stunning tone without adding any outboard effects or processing. On *Tokyo Jukebox 3*, since I'm playing so many vocal melodies and I want my guitar to actually sing instead of just being guitar-y, having this massive tone made it a lot easier to express myself. On *Senbonzakura*, throughout the whole song, guitar effects are kept to a minimum too but, towards the very end, you can really hear the tone naked and removing the wetness – insert schoolboy joke here – really gives the ending solo a unique sound that I like."

***Tokyo Jukebox 3* is out now on Avex Trax**

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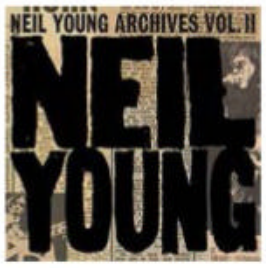
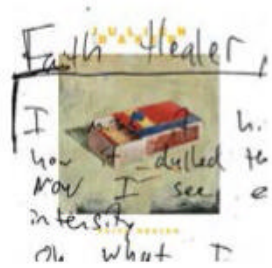
This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers



NEIL YOUNG
Homefires

Taken from his upcoming *Archives Vol. II: 1972-1976*, *Homefires* was recorded back in 1974 and is available to stream exclusively through the Neil Young Archives website and accompanying app.



JULIEN BAKER
Faith Healer

Released ahead of her third album *Little Oblivions*, this track showcases a more widescreen production than Baker has used in the past, but with a familiar bedrock of sumptuous arpeggiated guitar lines.

MRS SMITH
Antifa Niece

The satirical 'shred socialite' has earned a cult following online thanks to her absurdist humour and shredding skills. This tongue-in-cheek single showcases both – a two-handed tapathon for the 'Karen' in your life.

BLOSSOMS
Christmas Eve (Soul Purpose)

Earnest Christmas singles are thin on the ground from serious artists these days but this Stockport five-piece have bucked the trend with a festive belter sure to spread cheer with its jangly 12-string sounds.

FOO FIGHTERS
Shame Shame

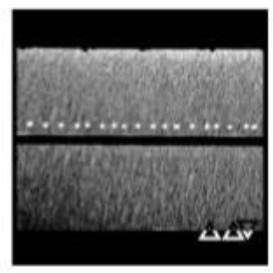
Released with the announcement of their 10th studio album *Medicine at Midnight*, this single represents a drastic change of pace for the Foos, with looping drums, funky bass and even strings.

GARDENING
ATC

The lead single from their new Magpie EP *Gardening*, the London band formally known as Mirror Shot have released a feel-good indie anthem to uplift you as the winter months draw in.

PHOEBE & MAGGIE
Iris

Phoebe Bridgers promised to record a cover of the Goo Goo Dolls hit should Joe Biden win the US election and, true to her word, with the help Maggie Rogers, she has totally reinvented the song in her unique style.



VENNART
Super Sleuth

The former Oceansize and current Biffy Clyro touring guitarist has returned with his latest album *In The Dead*, *Dead Wood*, and this teaser track is angular, scuzzy and stuffed with visceral guitar lines.

DOJA CAT
Say So (MTV EMA 2020)

The disco-pop hit was reimagined as a striking prog-metal epic by Doja Cat for her MTV EMA performance – but not without controversy, thanks to its perceived similarity to a track by Aussie maestro Plini.

PLINI
Papelillo

Speaking of which, the internet's favourite prog player has returned with his first album since *Handmade Cities*, and the lead single moves between smooth legato, jazz passages and all-out metal without being overbearing.

THE JADED HEARTS CLUB
I Put A Spell On You

Graham Coxon and Matt Bellamy trade fuzzed-out licks on this cover of Screamin' Jay Hawkins from surely the world's most high-profile function band. Turn to p30 to read our interview with Coxon and friends.

BLEACHERS FT. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
Chinatown

Jack Antonoff's indie-pop alter ego got fellow New Jerseyan Springsteen to lend his inimitable vocals to this unapologetically nostalgic ballad, full of driving acoustics, delicate synths and crowd-sung hooks.

COMPETITION

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GOING UNDERGROUND

Little Barrie's latest album was born in a basement studio and is heavy on atmospherics. We return to the scene of the sessions to find out how it all went down

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

To those who have heard him play, Barrie Cadogan is a national treasure. Informed by a heady brew of R&B, blues, psych, rock 'n' roll, garage, krautrock, soul and plenty more besides, he's a guitarist of impeccable taste with a fleet-fingered, elastic style that always serves the song and never fails to impress. Over the years, Cadogan has performed with indie royalty such as Primal Scream, Edwyn Collins and The The, while his own band, the eponymous Little Barrie, gained international exposure in 2015 when they penned the theme music for hit US TV show *Better Call Saul*.

In 2017, Little Barrie released their fifth long-player, *Death Express*, and were poised to set out on tour when drummer Virgil Howe – son of Yes guitarist Steve – suffered a heart attack and died suddenly at the age of just 41. Three years on from losing their friend and bandmate, Barrie Cadogan and bassist Lewis Wharton have unveiled their first new material, recorded in collaboration with Malcolm Catto, co-founder of London psychedelic jazz collective The Heliocentrics, former live drummer for DJ Shadow and custodian of a treasure trove of vintage analogue gear.

"I DIDN'T USE MUCH ON THIS RECORD. A LOT OF THE SOUNDS WERE DONE IN THE MIX. I DID MOST OF THE ALBUM WITH A COUPLE OF GUITARS, MY FRIEND'S JPF COMBO AND A CORNELL FUZZ FACE"

Producer Malcolm Catto lays down a groove on his vintage kit while Barrie whips up a frenzy with his devilish Kay at Catto's Quatermass Sound Lab studio in London

Comprising seven tracks and clocking in at 31 minutes, *Quatermass Seven* is a dense, claustrophobic collection of dark and filmic grooves that underpin Barrie's frayed fuzz explorations and haunting vocal melodies. "Still here, so fine, just a little darker state of mind," he sings ruefully on *Steel Drum*, one of the album's most immediate and most disarming hooks.

The tracks were cut predominantly live with minimal overdubs in Catto's Quatermass Sound Lab in East London. As well as contributing achingly cool drum parts, the Heliocentrics man occupied the producer's chair and even got hands-on with the guitar tones by patching in various stompboxes and outboard units during the mixing process.

"I didn't use much stuff on this record," says Barrie. "Quite a lot of the more tripped-out guitar sounds were done by Malcolm in the mix. We really wanted to work with him because we loved his music and we just left the tracks with him to do his thing. I did most of the album with a couple of different guitars, my friend's JPF combo and a Cornell Fuzz Face. I had a fuzz-wah pedal on one song and I occasionally used a bit of reverb but a lot of the reverbs and guitar effects were done by Mal."

Though the sessions were initially recorded to hard disk (with the finished mixes then being fed through a vintage Ampex tape machine before being mastered), one thing you won't hear on *Quatermass Seven* is your favourite plugin. "I try not to use plugins, just because everyone's using them," says Malcolm when we quiz him on his approach. "I just use a computer as a tape machine, basically just to edit. There's loads of effects that I process stuff through, just to try and find a sound, really. I've got some EMI stuff. You can distort the fuck out of the EMI valve preamps. It's a germanium desk as well, which kind of helps. Swedish broadcast from '65."

INTO THE GROOVE

Though the new album is arguably the band's most immersive work to date, it wasn't exactly mapped out when Barrie and Lewis arrived at Malcolm's studio. "After everything that happened with losing Virgil, we just wanted to go into the studio and try and do a couple of songs just to see what would happened," says Barrie. "But we came out with more. We came out with five songs and two instrumentals."

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THE DEVIL'S MUSIC

Barrie's 1963 Kay K592 Red Devil is one of the most interesting and unusual guitars in his collection. It also features on the new album…

"A good friend of mine was selling it because he wasn't playing it very often," says Barrie of his first encounter with this distinctive vintage hollowbody. "We met in a guitar shop and he was showing them the guitar to sell it to them. I tried it out and I really liked it. My friend said, 'You sound really good on that, why don't you just borrow it?' So I ended up borrowing it for quite a long time and eventually I bought it from him. I think the shop got a bit pissed off actually because they were hoping they could sell it and instead I ended up taking it home with me.

"It's got an amazing tone. My friend had spent a bit on it, getting new frets and things like that. It's got flatwounds on it and a wound third – it works better with a wound third. I tried it with a plain third and it wasn't as good. It's a lovely guitar. It sounds like nothing else I've got. I can get a really good jazz tone out of it and I can get T-Bone Walker sounds with it, R&B, soul stuff. But if you crank it, it sounds like Link Wray.

"There's an instrumental on the album called *T.R.A.B.S.* that was just done live with no overdubs and that was using this guitar. It kicks in with the fuzzbox half way through."

"We've done quite a lot of punchy, short and slightly more rock 'n' roll things and we just wanted to do something different this time," Barrie continues, "keeping the energy and the spirit of old records that we like but trying to take it somewhere else. I've been a fan of Malcolm's music for a long time – we really wanted his spin on it, to take us somewhere different from the records we'd done before."

From guitar tones to mixes, Barrie placed a great deal of faith in Malcolm's abilities. "There aren't many people that I'd just leave a record with and trust to mix it but I trusted Mal 100 per cent. I trusted letting go with Mal because of the sound of his records and I just knew that he got it. Malcolm sent quite a few mixes of some of these tracks – he didn't send us a bad mix. It was sometimes hard to choose."

Malcolm is keen to stress that his love for all things analogue is not about fetishising vintage gear – it's about using the optimal technology to capture the energy of a live band. "I'm not trying to do a vintage thing because I'm just stuck on vintage – it's not that," he says. "All that stuff in the 1970s sounds wicked, right? And then the 1980s comes along and there's a new sound, there's a new production and everyone goes for it! Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, everyone jumps on board. 'This is great! It's new!' No, it's shit. I'm sorry. It suits some kinds of music but funk and jazz stuff from that era sounds hideous.

"The ethos behind owning all this vintage gear is basically that the late '60s to the late '70s, for me, is the pinnacle sound for live music. Modern technology works for modern music but it's not live music. This gear wouldn't work so well for programmed stuff but it sounds wicked for anything spiritual."

Barrie agrees. "I've played with bands and, let's say we've done something on TV. When you're playing in the room, you think the band sounds pretty cooking. But when you watch the broadcast back, you're just like, 'What have they done to it? It sounds so thin and so small.'

"How come when you watch footage of *Ready Steady Go!* it sounds amazing? Eddie Kramer mixed the Woodstock soundtrack – they had eight channels and it sounds incredible. They were taking studio gear outdoors so they were trying to keep Neumann mics out of the rain and everything. But, to say that the whole thing was done on eight channels, it's pretty heavy really."

"That's all you fucking need," says Malcolm, with a laugh. "I've got bands coming down here. They send me files to mix and it's 40 channels! The first thing I do is take out 12 drum mics. It's like, no, you don't need the underside of the floor tom. I don't want to hear it! Just because you've got it doesn't mean you should use it. You've got to be discerning."

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IS PIANO AND ORCHESTRA

LET IT BLEED

The phrase, "Just because you've got it doesn't mean you should use it" ought to be chiselled above the doorway of every recording studio on the planet. And anyone who has spent time in studios with bands will be familiar with that sinking feeling that occurs when the playback in the control room just doesn't capture the raw energy you are used to experiencing during a gig or rehearsal-room performance.

"Sometimes you try to make your recordings sound like your rehearsal tape, because your tape's got the vibe," says Barrie. "I read recently that when Fugazi used to rehearse in the 1980s, Ian MacKaye used to sing near the ghettoblaster so they could balance his voice and the band. They got good rehearsal tapes doing that. Sometimes you're trying to get that vibe and separating everything doesn't do it."

"What people don't realise," adds Malcolm, "is that on all those old recordings, there's so much extra that you get through bleed. When you can hear other things on a channel, it creates the air, it creates a picture – it's like a painting, rather than a cold, dead sound. There's an art to it."

During the *Quatermass Seven* sessions, the trio set up in the live room and played largely without headphones. It's a testament to their musicianship that only a single day of rehearsals was required before hitting record. "If you over-rehearse stuff, it loses any kind of spontaneity," says Malcolm.

"ON ALL THOSE OLD RECORDINGS, THERE'S SO MUCH EXTRA THAT YOU GET THROUGH BLEED. IT CREATES THE AIR, IT CREATES A PICTURE – IT'S LIKE A PAINTING"

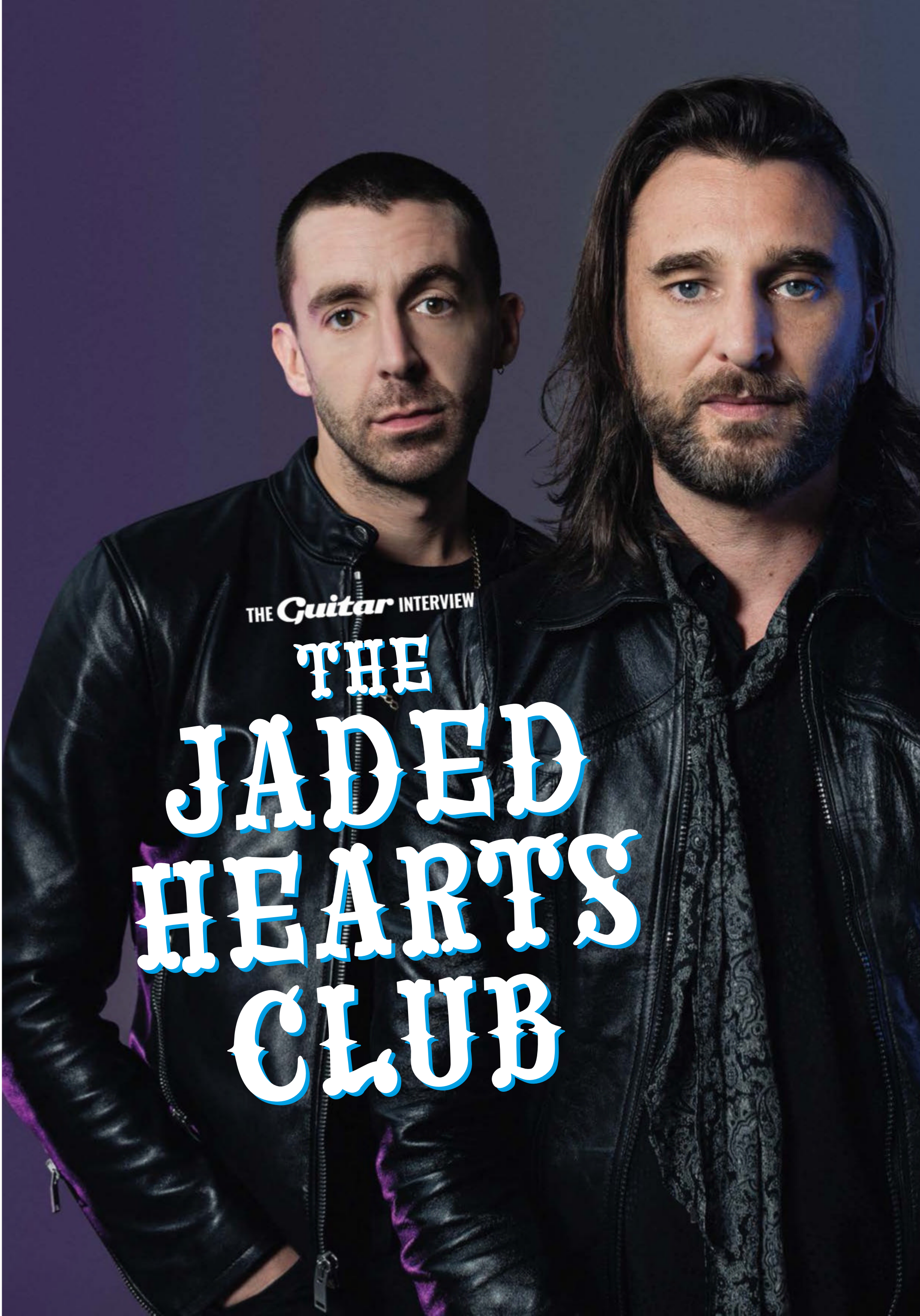
"With making music, you're trying to convey something. Either energy or something of yourself, some emotion. It has to convey something. It's about capturing a performance. But with production, some stuff you just don't want to touch. I didn't do much production on this. Some stuff I really have to fucking produce, because it's lacking. This was just about mixing it and capturing the heaviness."

"It was exciting doing takes and going back into the control room to listen," says Barrie. "Things just felt good. Obviously, me and Lewis felt strange after everything that had happened, but it just felt exciting."

Before we leave, Barrie and Malcolm treat us to a brief jam that's the closest thing to a gig either of them have played – and that we have attended – in months. With Barrie's Kay Red Devil plugged into one of the house amps and swathed in spring reverb, Malcolm lays down an insistent, jazzy groove on his no-name vintage drum kit. It's like the soundtrack to a lost late-1960s road movie – and they make it look effortless. With any luck, *Quatermass Seven* will be the first of many collaborations between them.

Catto's minimal but finely tuned kit echoes his discerning, no-nonsense approach to production

Quatermass Seven is out now on Madlib Invazion



THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

THE JADED HEARTS CLUB

What do you get when a bunch of A-list friends including Matt Bellamy and Graham Coxon get together and make an album of scuzzed-up Motown classics? You get The Jaded Hearts Club's enjoyable debut album, that's what. We sit down with Coxon and bandmates Miles Kane and Nic Cester to talk Mansons, soundtracks, wild effects and trying to keep track of what Bellamy is up to…

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

It's been a while since we had a bona fide rock 'n' roll supergroup on the scene, hasn't it? There was a time when they seemed to be everywhere. But it feels like years since a bunch of proper rock stars got together and formed a band for the sheer fun of smashing out tunes together and celebrating the music they love – and that's precisely what The Jaded Hearts Club is all about.

Formed as an impromptu Beatles covers band for a friend's birthday in 2017, the concept attracted attention for its all-star line-up, which includes Muse megastar Matt Bellamy on bass and Blur icon Graham Coxon on guitar.

It was the sort of impromptu fun that you want to last – and so The Jaded Hearts Club did what came naturally to these rock 'n' roll veterans: they became a genuine band, albeit one playing much smaller shows than anyone in its line-up was used to. Bellamy and Coxon were joined by Sean Payne of The Zutons on drums, singers Nic Cester of Jet and Miles Kane of The Last Shadow Puppets, as well as guitarist Jamie Davies, the man whose birthday spawned the act's first assemblage.

For the next few years, the band played impromptu gigs in bars and clubs, plus the odd high-profile charity show. They even performed with Paul McCartney at an event in 2018, before the idea formed last year that they should book some studio time and document their endeavours.

The result is an album of fuzzed-out covers of beloved songs and Motown gems, featuring everything from *I Put A Spell On You* to Vera Lynn's *We'll Meet Again* (no, really). It's like the world's most illustrious function band has turned up to your local club to scuzz up the classics.

In an attempt to make sense of this brilliantly bonkers idea, we catch up – from a responsible distance – with the trifecta of Coxon, Kane and Cester in a tastefully appointed Hackney warehouse to find out about the challenges of not only creating a full album during a pandemic but doing so when your band members are scattered around the world.

Matt Bellamy and Miles Kane on stage at SXSW in 2018

The record's lead single *I'll Be There* sounds huge. How did you record something like this amid a pandemic?

Nic Cester: "That was the only one that happened during full lockdown, right? Where were you Graham?"

Graham Coxon: "I was in Los Angeles. We had a Zoom meeting about how we were going to do it. We thought we'd go after Morricone a bit on the intro."

Miles Kane: "That one sounds the best, for me. I just absolutely love it. When Jamie sent it to me, it blew my mind. I had that on repeat when I was strutting around. It's great."

How did you approach the song in terms of guitar?

GC: "I think I was hinting at the brass part in this case. Jamie is thrashing through the rhythm and I'm just putting a few toppings on the old margarita – some olives and stuff, a bit of rhythm and some lead-like bits, fingers that can't stay still – all the hammer-ons!

"You know, when you grow up with The Beatles and stuff like that, psychedelic music becomes the norm. I can't get through a song unless it's tickling my ears with some nice bits and bobs. I get bored unless there are some things coming out, so I was into how that song sounded. We managed to get in some great little backing vocal moments I wasn't expecting.

"It's great to see how seriously Matt gets into it as a producer. For him, these things have to sound amazing. He's not just doing all this for a giggle, it's serious stuff. The orchestration too. There's woodwind, the backing vocals – so many textures. It's great because we play the parts and everything sounds good, and then there's a lot of magic sprinkled on top by Matt and Jamie. We're basically amplifying what's already there in the original songs."

Your guitar work on *I Put A Spell On You* is extraordinary.

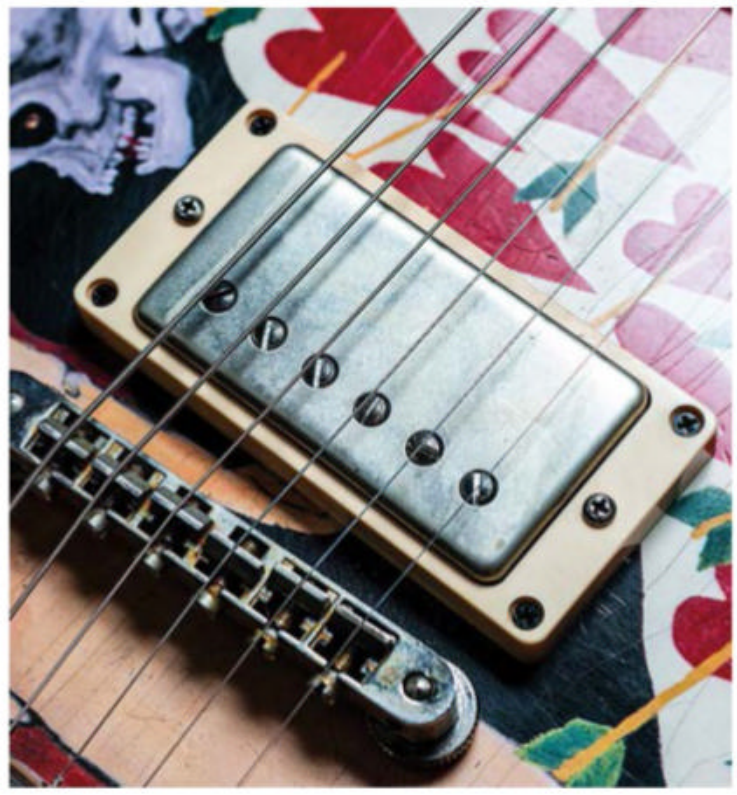
GC: "Yeah, I whammy'd it a bit. I think Matt put a [Mu-Tron] Octavider on it too. There's a lot of big divebombs. I'd like to have gone a bit more nuts on that solo but there's a moment where Nic does this fucking blood-curdling scream and I wanted to support that. It's such a rush, a real moment.

"The process pushed the boundaries of what's possible, especially with Matt's love of extremely fat and fuzzy bass. There has to be room for it in the mix. If people had been trying to use these sounds on vinyl in the mid-1970s, the needle would've jumped out of the groove straight away! It's like these songs have been abducted, put in a spaceship, taken round the universe and then returned."

© Jim Bennett / Wirelmage / Getty Images

“It’s like these songs have been abducted, put in a spaceship and taken round the universe”
GRAHAM COXON

Graham Coxon's Friedman Metro-D is decorated with one of his own paintings



The cover of Peggy Lee's *Fever* is pretty atmospheric too.

GC: "I don't know that one!"

MK: "I think Matt's just singing that one."

GC: "*Fever*? Matt just does these things, like *We'll Meet Again* and stuff."

MK: "I'm on that one. Basically we did the record and Matt bookended it with those two tunes. That was one of his ideas, I think."

GC: "We're doing press and we don't even know what's going on!"

MK: "Matt's probably changing it again right now. It'll be a different album now compared to the one that you've heard!"

There are some interesting guitar tones and textures on the record.

NC: "I arrived at the sessions towards the end of recording so I could sing over them and I had the pleasure of watching Graham finishing off his parts, which was a lot of fun."

GC: "I used this Friedman. I saw these guitars at NAMM two years ago. I picked one up and plugged it into one of their Small Box amplifiers, and I was in a sort of sonic bliss – and I'm not at all geeky like that. I'm not tone-obsessed or anything like that. I've always just got on with things really. But playing that guitar, I thought, 'Oh my gosh, yes, this is lovely'. So I bought that guitar and the amp on the spot, and then asked if they could put one of my paintings on a guitar, which is this one."

MK: "Is that an old guitar?"

GC: "It's new. They're made by Grover Jackson. They have his signature on the back of the headstock, so you know they're darn fine. I thought this was just a fantastic stripped-down hotrod – just a volume and tone for rockin' and a-rollin', you know? This guitar was a little relic'd but I wanted it to be more relic'd, to be honest, so that the painting would be a bit more covered up.

"I arrived towards the end of recording and had the pleasure of watching Graham finishing off his parts, which was a lot of fun"

NIC CESTER

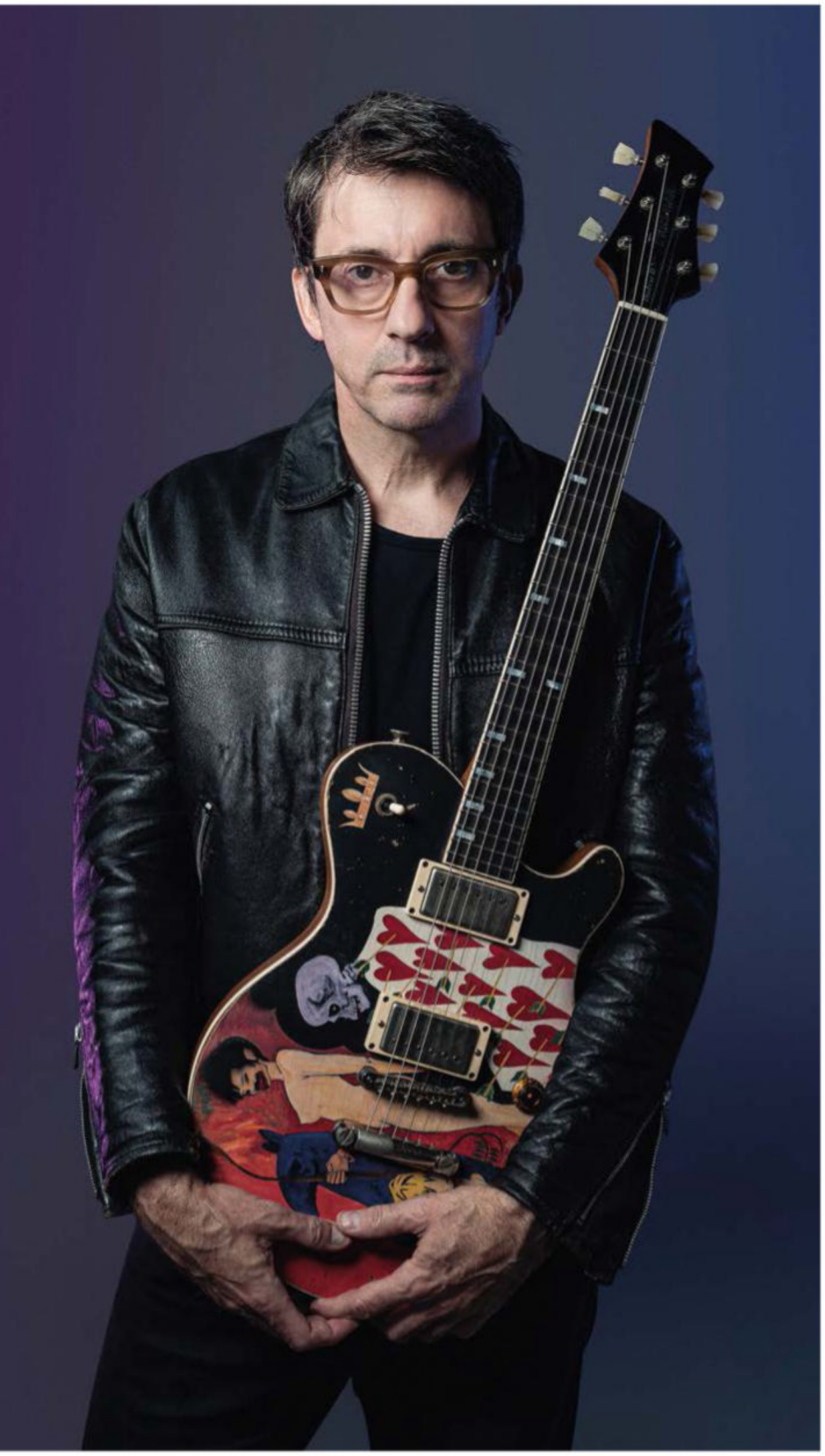
Coxon couldn't be in a band with Matt Bellamy without taking a Sustainiac-loaded Manson for a spin...

"It's got a maple top and I think it's a mahogany body and neck, although they were experimenting with a lot of different woods at the time. It's a bit like a Les Paul. It's got some really nice PAF-style things going on. I love everything about it!

"The one I got without the painting on it is wonderful too. It looks properly battered. On this one, I had to scrape the bottom bit of the picture off because I didn't like the way it worked with the carved top. I might put a little bit of stain on the bare wood too. It really needs to be thrashed around on a tour at some point."

Given Matt's ownership of the brand, it's perhaps not surprising to see you with a Manson. But it's different to what you usually play.

GC: "This is the other end of the scale! It's très modern. This is the Manson GC-1 with a killswitch, a Sustainiac system, all sorts of stuff. I love a bit of noise-making and sometimes, with the older guitars, they can be ill-equipped for that. You can't get some of that stuff with a Bigsby but this guitar is going to withstand all kinds of hideous treatment. Modern guitars that don't fold up in your hand are good for that sort of abuse.



"It's basically like a Tele. Matt has one with a Kaoss Pad but this one has a Sustainiac pickup here and you just go 'clink' and off it goes, and you get three different variations of that sound."

MK: "How do you feel about playing the new guitar? Do you like it? I never like the feel of a new neck."

GC: "The neck is fine. It's just a neck – have a feel! I have a lot of vintage-style guitars but this is a bit more high-gain, higher-output pickups, that sort of thing.

"Matt had one that was kind of a khaki green. I liked the matte finish, so I got in touch with Adrian [Ashton] at Manson Guitars and he sorted me out. I told him where I wanted him to put the switches and stuff like that, and asked him to put GC-1 on it, hinting that there might be a GC-2."

Were there any other guitars that featured prominently on the record asides from those two?

GC: "I also used a lovely Patrick Eggle electric. He made me something kind of like a Telecaster with two Wide Range-style humbuckers and a tremolo arm, which is something I'm comfortable with. You can do loads on them, especially if you can coil-tap, then you've got the best of a few worlds. The Friedman is untapped though. It's extremely old-school – just wood and wire.

"I like versatile guitars. I still sit and stroke my 1966 Gibson ES-330, my old SG Special, my 335 and all the rest. I like the idea that the guitars are evolving, just like this music, where we're dragging beautiful old-school songs kicking and screaming into a wider bandwidth of sound. It makes sense to me to use instruments that can back up that concept.

"It's not just me though. Matt's got this new bass with all the secret weaponry in it. It's mad. He's got all these crazy fucking things."

MK: "Is that the one that glows in the dark?"

GC: "It's very conceptual."

NC: "It's functional too. It's not just crazy shit for the sake of it. There's a purpose behind everything."

GC: "Absolutely. Matt has these concepts and ideas and he makes them a reality, and that's an amazing quality. He has a thought and just does it. I'd be there biting my nails but he just sorts it out."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are some mind-blowing effects moments on the record too.

GC: "I've never been too geeky about that sort of thing. In the old days, you had your Boss pedals, and I had a Watson fuzz, but that was about it. I've had Marshalls and I've recently been messing about with other amps, and effects have obviously come a long way recently. People are making really cool stuff. There's that mad Third Man fuzz pedal by Gamechanger Audio – I've got one of those going on."

NC: "The Tesla-looking one?"

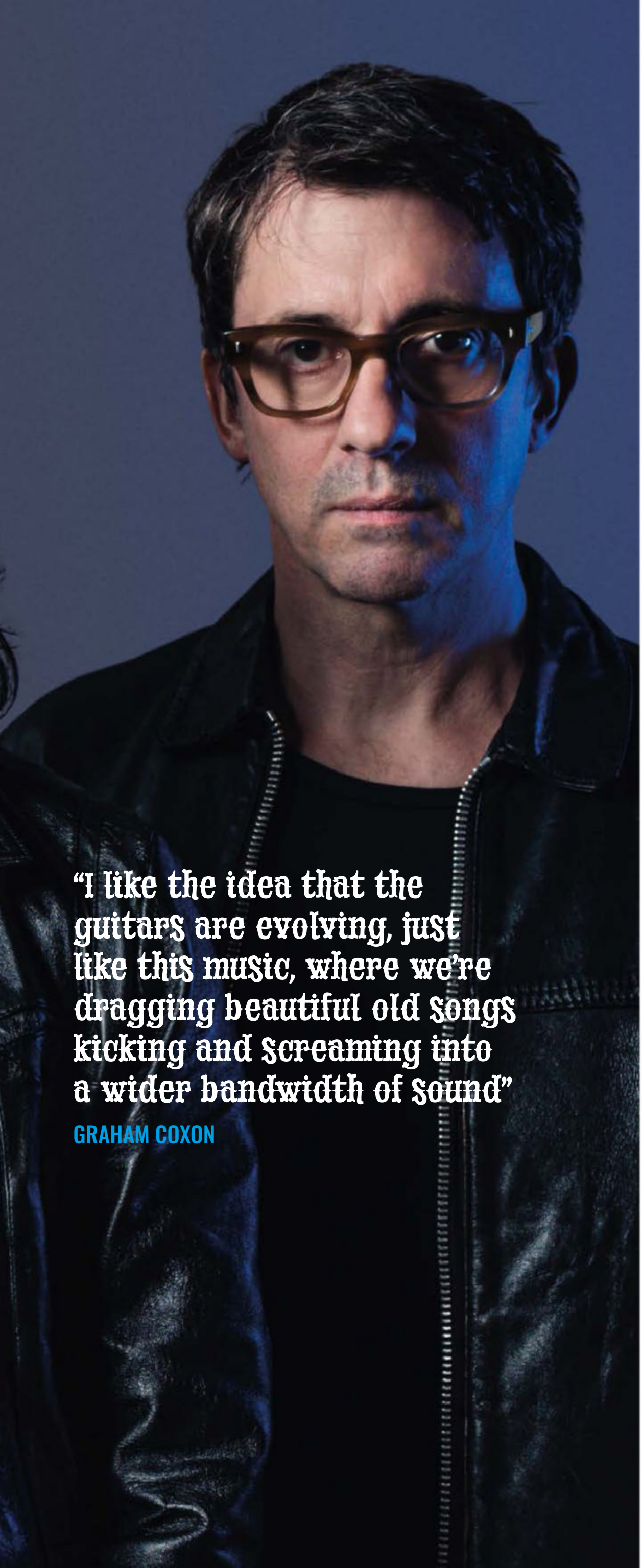
GC: "Yes, the one with the electric-looking thing in the middle. Jack White was responsible for this version. Matt has some other groovy things – there was a Pete Cornish treble booster knocking about and we were splitting the signal in all kinds of directions and going into a priceless old Marshall."

Graham, you've been doing a lot of acoustic stuff recently, particularly on the soundtrack side of things. Was there any acoustic laid down for the record?

GC: "I am entirely electric with this project. But I've been doing lots of acoustic tunes recently – old-timey Roger Miller and Burl Ives-type stuff for soundtracks. People are coming to me now for fingerpicking acoustic

"Matt's probably changing it again right now. It'll be a different album now compared to the one that you've heard"

MILES KANE



soundtrack stuff. I worked on the Netflix series *I Am Not Okay With This*, and there’s some stuff – not the Bloodwitch album [a fictional band featured in the show that Coxon ended up recording an entire album for] – but the things that people probably didn’t notice, as they sounded pretty old. There’s a scene in a bowling alley with a little country song playing in the background, and that’s something I did.”

MK: “For that sort of thing, do they send you the video first and then you watch it and write the music, or do you just write the tunes and they put it in afterwards?”

GC: “Actually, they made that series pretty quick, so it had all been filmed beforehand. I’d watch things and go to meetings in Hollywood and sort it out. With [award-winning Channel 4 and Netflix comedy] *The End of the F***ing World*, I had a head start on that because I’d read the script. They were filming while as I was working, and I was getting bits of footage. It was a different work ethic, which was new to me. You have to get used to it, as you’ve got to get stuff done every day. You have to approach it as a nine-to-five. At the end of each day, you’ll have three or four things to send off and forget about them the day after.”

MK: “Did you like working like that? I know I do.”

GC: “I did! I was like, ‘Shit, there’s 120 songs!’ And after a few weeks of working like that, bloody Nora! Not everything you send through is going to make it in but some of my favourite songs I’ve written are in those soundtracks, because they’re quick and you write the lyrics quickly. You realise where the lyrics came from a little bit further down the line or when someone asks you what the fuck that song was about. You think, ‘Oh, actually, I know now!’ I still love playing the acoustic. I’m not going to get any better at it, but I like a bit of drop D fingerstyle.”

Is there anything else about the record that you’d like to talk about before we let you go?

GC: “You’re only our second interview. We haven’t been asked a lot of stuff yet!”

MK: “No questions have been put to us really!”

GC: “Who is the last to get out of bed on tour? We can’t answer that. What’s on the turntable in the tour bus? We haven’t had that one yet! There’s so much still to find out!”

You’ve Always Been Here by The Jaded Hearts Club is out now on Infectious Records

SCREEN TIME

He's shared stages with some of pop's biggest stars but these days Giles Palmer's guitar playing is more likely to soundtrack your night in than your night out

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Throughout an exhausting yet largely sedentary 2020, many of us spent even more time than usual with our eyes glued to our televisions, binging on boxsets and Netflix shows. You may not realise it but, if those shows included the likes of *Ozark* or *Selling Sunset*, you've already heard the compositional talents of UK-based songwriter, producer and vintage guitar aficionado Giles Palmer.

Palmer already had a rich and diverse session career before setting up his own studio and turning his hand to songwriting for TV. From touring the US at the age of just 21, he went on to share stages with the likes of Smash Mouth, Train, and Destiny's Child, as well as feature on sessions, festival stages and TV and radio appearances alongside Kylie Minogue, Kelly Clarkson, All Saints, Dido, Neil Diamond, Paul McCartney and plenty more besides.

Encircled by a magnificent array of vintage instruments, we sit down with Giles in his studio in Bridport, Dorset to find out why golden-era gear is the key ingredient to his songwriting process and production workflow – both as essential tools and as architects of inspiration.

How would you describe your job?

"I write and produce songs that get used on TV, be it as part of a series, reality TV or an advert. It's all songwriting to fit a requested genre. Songs have to sound familiar yet be totally original. There can be no plagiarism. That's a massive thing these days.

"Everything we do has a vocal, a great melody and complete production that we pretty much do in-house. We do a wide range of genres too – everything from current pop to recreating retro soul tracks, country, old-fashioned rock 'n' roll and even punk.

"We're given quite tight briefs by production companies to create a couple of finished songs so that they can put together an album of that type of material. You have to be able to distil the essence of a particular artist or genre, then recreate it."

Do you collaborate with other musicians?

"I work with my long-time collaborator Rupert Pope. We have different skills and complement each other's abilities well. We do most of it in-house. I do lots of top-line melody, guitar, bass and lyrics, and he's more piano, strings and production. We then get a singer in and we've got pretty much everything you need.

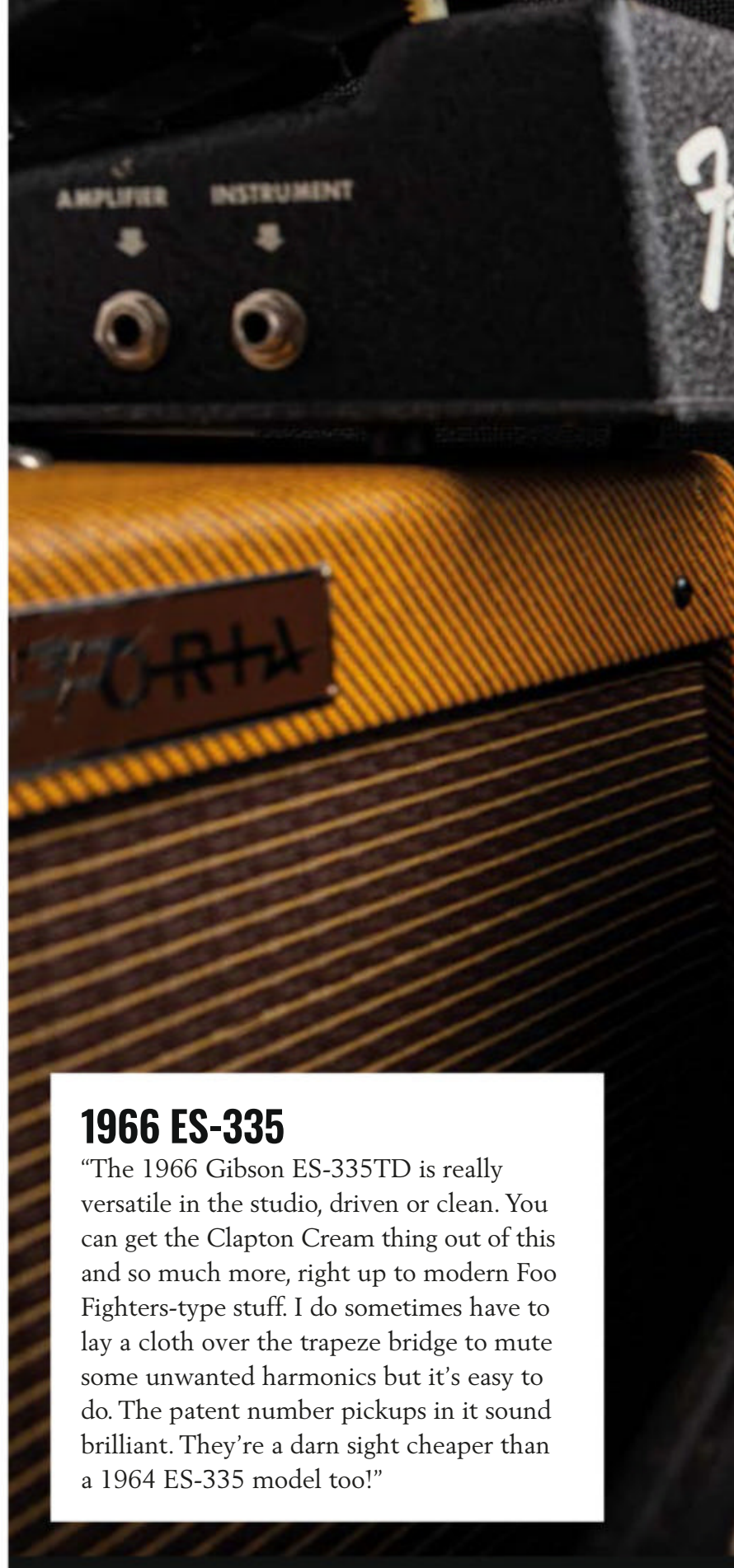
ABOVE Giles Palmer's 1960 Junior and 1966 sunburst Strat see a lot of action

"We sometimes get extra live musicians, such as string and brass sections, and drummers, to expand the tracks if needed, which is increasingly happening remotely over the internet. If it's a modern pop track, you don't really need a live drummer; the drums can be programmed. If it's something live with a more retro vibe – we did some country stuff recently – it's got to be live musicians. People still want that and you can still hear the difference."

How does your process work?

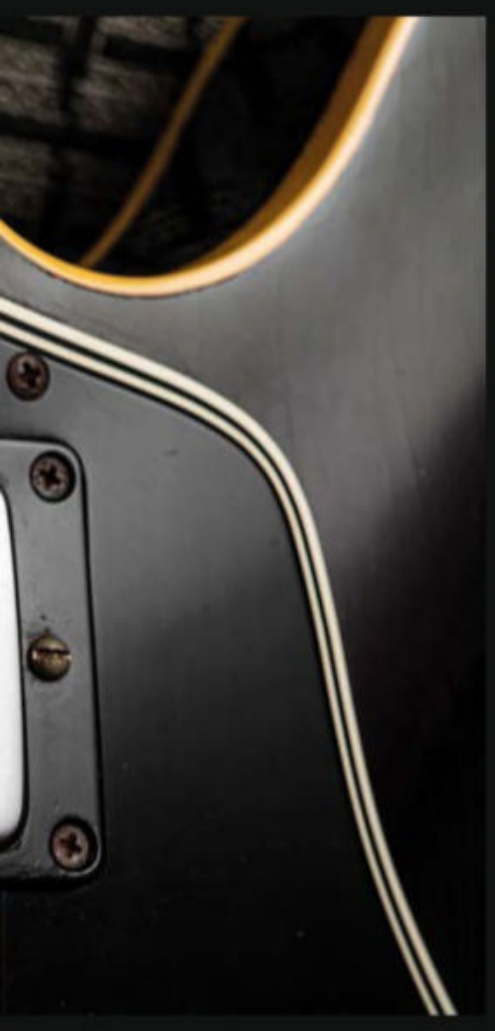
"Writing songs for music publishing companies is different to scoring pictures. Increasingly, I believe the former can be a better way to work, because tracks can be used multiple times – a track might get used in a TV advert and then in a film or a Netflix show later. If you're writing a score for a specific show, that's the only time it gets used. If it's a prestigious show, that's great. But I find it suits me better to write and create complete songs that can be used many times.

"First, I create a playlist in whatever genre is required. I study lyrics, themes and imagery, and take note of chord progressions, lyrical plot lines, styles, dynamics, structures, formats. You have to do your homework!"



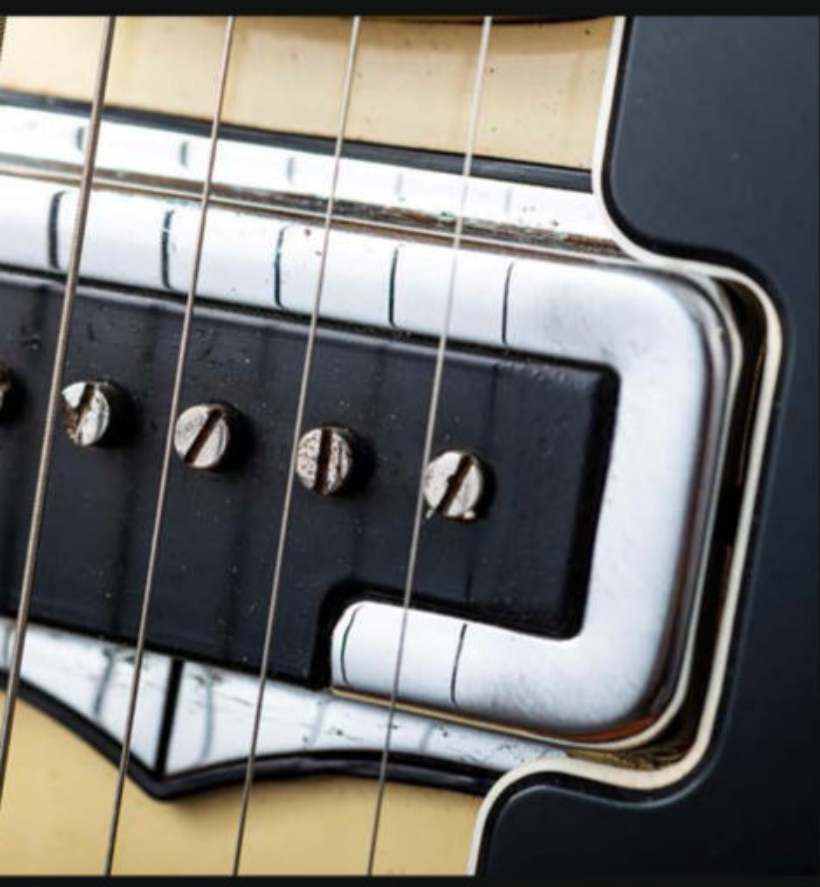
1966 ES-335

"The 1966 Gibson ES-335TD is really versatile in the studio, driven or clean. You can get the Clapton Cream thing out of this and so much more, right up to modern Foo Fighters-type stuff. I do sometimes have to lay a cloth over the trapeze bridge to mute some unwanted harmonics but it's easy to do. The patent number pickups in it sound brilliant. They're a darn sight cheaper than a 1964 ES-335 model too!"



Gibson

1967 FENDER CORONADO

"Apart from the super-rare Tuxedo Telecaster, my Olympic White '67 Coronado is probably the only other Fender of the era that you'll find with an Olympic White finish and black binding. I purchased it from the band Two Door Cinema Club. It was described as in quite poor condition but it just needed a really good clean – it's virtually mint now. That was a reasonably priced way to get a 1960s custom-colour Fender! The DeArmond pickups sound really sweet and are great for different textures in studio tracks."

ABOVE This mid-1960s Fender Duo-Sonic II is in most respects a hardtail Mustang and another quirky wellspring of songwriting inspiration

Having such an eclectic musical background must help?
"That's where the session past comes in. Prior to this, I was a session musician for 10 years, which prepares you for that: you have to be able to deliver different styles under pressure quickly and efficiently."

What TV work have you been involved in recently?
"Lots of Netflix stuff recently. Shows such as *Ozark*, and reality stuff like *Selling Sunset* and *Love Island*, all the stuff my kids watch. I've also done children's stuff like CBBC, movies, trailers, adverts. The whole Netflix revolution has been great; there's so much content being produced. One of the production companies we work with is over in LA and they're looking for original stuff all the time."

Do you find international collaborations are more common now?
"With the internet, you can collaborate with anyone in any part of the world. I don't think publishing or TV companies mind where you work or live as long as you can deliver the finished product.

1968 TELECASTER WITH BIGSBY

"My 1968 Telecaster with the Bigsby gets a lot of use too. It still has the nitro neck and body finish in 1968 and the Bigsby opens up the Tele to a whole new world of possibilities. The maple cap necks have such a unique sound too, a real snap to them. A custom-colour black Fender was still a pretty rare thing to see in 1968."

"We deal with people in LA all the time, as well as people in the UK. We often work with singers out in Nashville. It's great because you just do it all online. I can record in my studio, send it off to them, then they'll record a part and send it back. It's a brilliant way to work. It's cost-effective and you don't have to fly to Nashville and hire a big studio."

Has the pandemic had any impact on your work?

"As far as self-isolation goes, as a studio musician I'm ahead of the curve anyway! But a lot of the stuff we do ends up on reality TV and, because Netflix and Amazon haven't been able to create that kind of content during the pandemic, there'll be a negative effect on income revenue streams next year."

How important is it to be able to recreate the sonic identity of genres and artists?

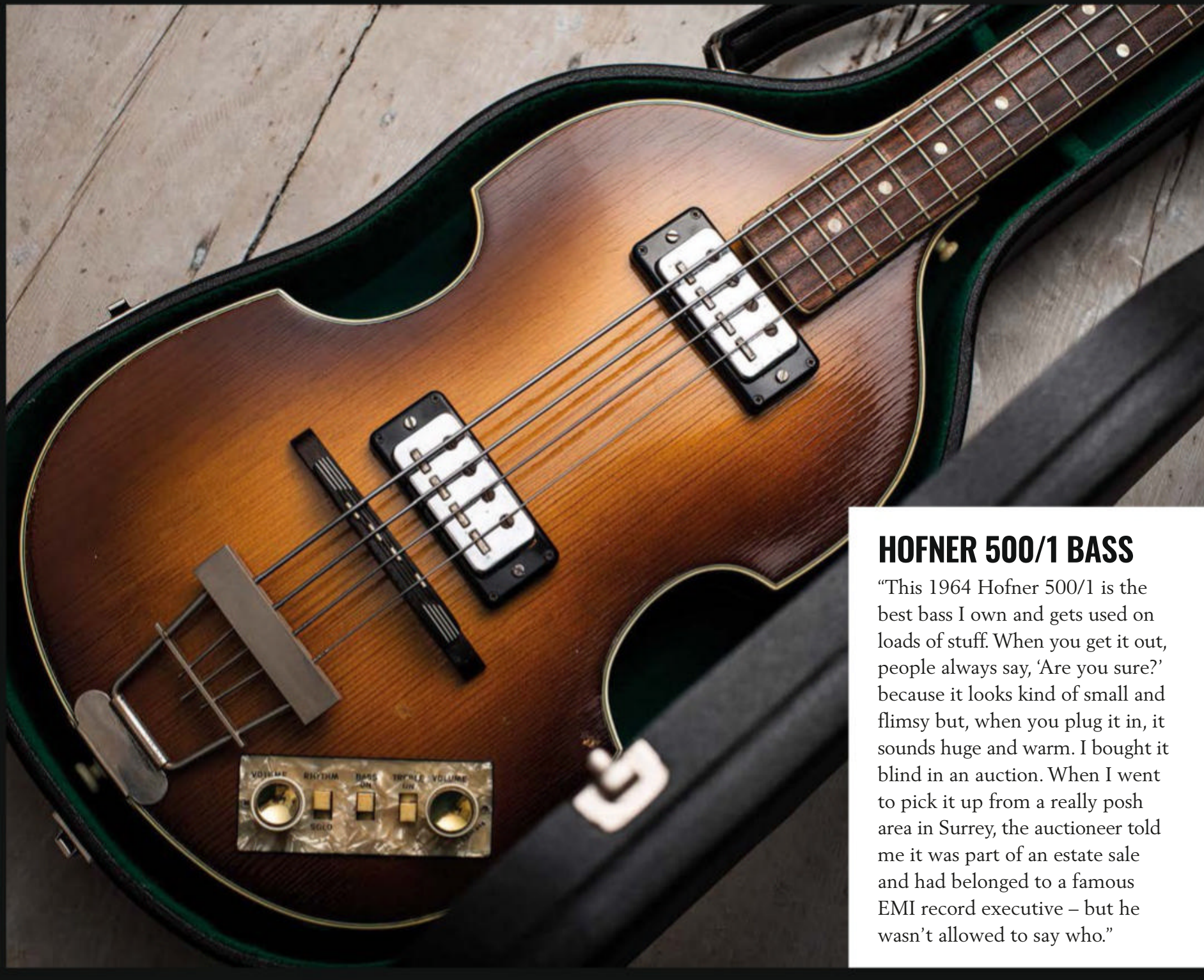
"It's absolutely essential and that's where the vintage guitars really excel. If you use the right gear – the gear that's actually used on the original records – that's just what it sounds like. If you use a 1961 Gretsch through a vintage Deluxe Reverb, then it's going to make that sound you've heard on the radio a thousand times.

"THE VINTAGE STUFF INSPIRES ME TO WRITE. NOT ONLY IS VINTAGE GEAR CRUCIAL TO GETTING THOSE ERA-ACCURATE TONES BUT IT'S MY MAIN SOURCE OF SONG INSPIRATION"

Whether people know it or not, they immediately identify subconsciously that it sounds like something from that era.

"My 1961 Gretsch 6120 would probably be my desert island guitar. It's so atmospheric, the way it sustains and vibrates. The Bigsby is perfect. Everything about it just works – and it shouldn't because it's really been through the mill. It's sustained some fire damage on the back. It's a total warhorse but it sounds great on everything.

"I never thought I'd actually own one of these. I still stare at it in wonder. I stupidly sold it once. I immediately realised what I'd done as I walked away from the sale at King's Cross station. I wanted to run after the guy and beg for it back. About a year later,



HOFNER 500/1 BASS

"This 1964 Hofner 500/1 is the best bass I own and gets used on loads of stuff. When you get it out, people always say, 'Are you sure?' because it looks kind of small and flimsy but, when you plug it in, it sounds huge and warm. I bought it blind in an auction. When I went to pick it up from a really posh area in Surrey, the auctioneer told me it was part of an estate sale and had belonged to a famous EMI record executive – but he wasn't allowed to say who."

1966 FENDER STRATOCASTER

"For tracking anything pop, it's hard to beat my 1966 sunburst Fender Stratocaster. I've tried so many vintage Strats from different years and I haven't found a better one. I just love the look of the big headstock. Duane Allman is pictured playing a similar one in a recording session for Wilson Pickett."

"EVERYTHING ABOUT IT JUST WORKS – AND IT SHOULDN'T BECAUSE IT'S REALLY BEEN THROUGH THE MILL"

FACING PAGE Giles describes his Gretsch 6120 as his "desert island guitar," though the fire damage on its rear gives new meaning to the term 'flame maple'

I saw it come back up for sale so I grabbed it! I think it was meant to be."

Does vintage gear help inspire your writing or performances?

"The vintage stuff inspires me to write. Not only is vintage gear crucial to getting those era-accurate tones for the songs but it's my main source of song inspiration. The guitars are all different and make you play differently. They make you think differently. It's just the sound, the right tool for the job.

"My 1966 Fender Deluxe Reverb is my favourite amp. It's instant guitar heaven and just makes anything you plug into it sing and sound like the old records. The reverb and tremolo are sublime.

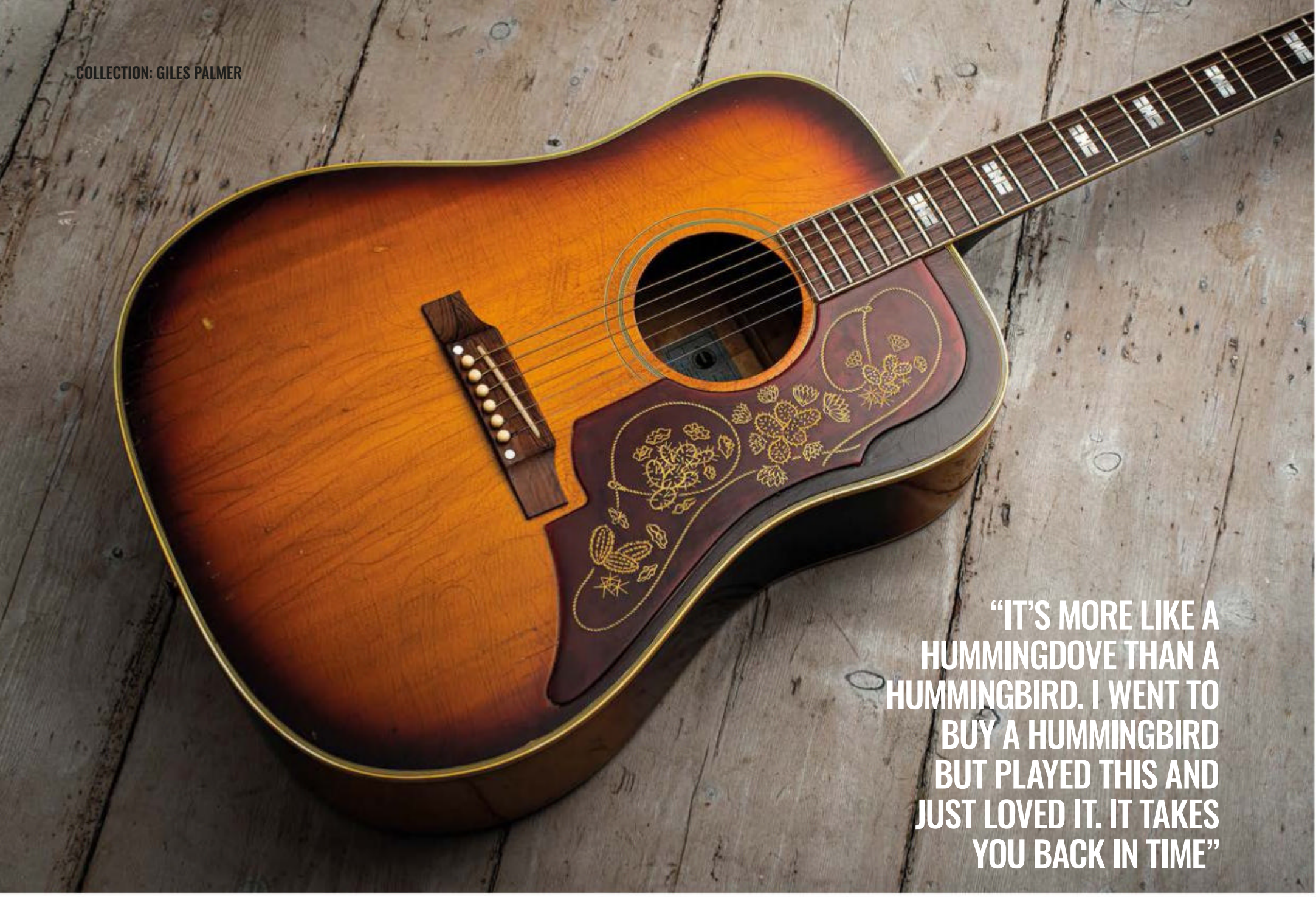
"There is a reason why records sound like they do. Obviously, there's the human element, who's playing them. But it's also the gear they used. If you're trying to recreate that, you have to use that gear and recreate that signal path. I find this can set you apart from other people and give your work a professional polish."

What are some of your most-used writing and recording guitars?

"I write a lot on acoustics and my 1966 Epiphone Frontier Acoustic with the cactus and ropes pickguard just puts me in mind of the Stones, Gram Parsons and Noel Gallagher. It's more like a Hummingdove than a Hummingbird. I went to buy a Hummingbird but played this and just loved it. It takes you back in time.

Treble Booster
On/Off
Input
GRETSCH
BAND
HOSPITALITY
WORLD TOUR 2009
ARTIST
PROG 4
TOP POPS
BBC
TELEVISION CENTRE

COLLECTION: GILES PALMER



“IT’S MORE LIKE A HUMMINGDOVE THAN A HUMMINGBIRD. I WENT TO BUY A HUMMINGBIRD BUT PLAYED THIS AND JUST LOVED IT. IT TAKES YOU BACK IN TIME”

ABOVE Giles does much of his writing on this beautiful 1966 Epiphone Frontier

FACING PAGE TOP This impressive collection has provided the soundtrack to TV shows watched by millions

“My TV Yellow double-cut Les Paul Junior from 1960 is just Keith Richards, Johnny Thunders, Mick Jones from The Clash, Steve Diggle from The Buzzcocks – probably the coolest guitar ever made! It’s hard to find them in good condition, especially in the UK. I suspect a lot of them got trashed in punk bands back in the day.

“There’s also my rare 1959 Epiphone Coronet in factory black. It’s like the lovechild of a 1950s Fender Esquire and a Les Paul Junior. It has a perfect chunky V neck and a lightweight mahogany body like a double-cut Tele. The design is totally bonkers and absolutely perfect in equal measure. I’d seen a few pictures of these and always thought they looked so cool. They’re super-rare. Only about 200 were made in 1959. When one came up for sale in the UK, I had to go and have a look.

“If it’s a rock session, then the Junior and the Coronet are just awesome. We did some punk stuff a few years ago and the Junior was fantastic for that. It’s like the ultimate prop isn’t it? They really put you in the zone. You are using the very thing that they were using back in the day.

“I’ve got a couple of rare early 1970s Marshall Lead & Bass combos, which complement them perfectly. They’re quite rare – they made these in 2x10 combo form for mail order only, I believe. I’ve only seen a few others. I bought these as a pair about 10 years ago. They’re very glassy and three-dimensional-sounding. They’re awesome clean and they crunch up beautifully too.”

Are there any downsides to recording with vintage guitars?

“Physically, there are certain things you can’t do on certain vintage guitars. But the constraints of that are actually really good for creativity. They can force you to think or approach parts differently, maybe even play less or in a different style.

“Sometimes you don’t want something that’s the slickest, most playable thing in the world. As long as you set them up right and sort the intonation out, I find them totally inspiring and useful tools.”

So you’ll be using vintage guitars for the foreseeable future?

“I just find them so inspiring. Vintage electric guitars don’t even have to be plugged in to be inspiring. It’s just the escapism, the vibe and the history. When you’re being creative, escapism is hugely important.

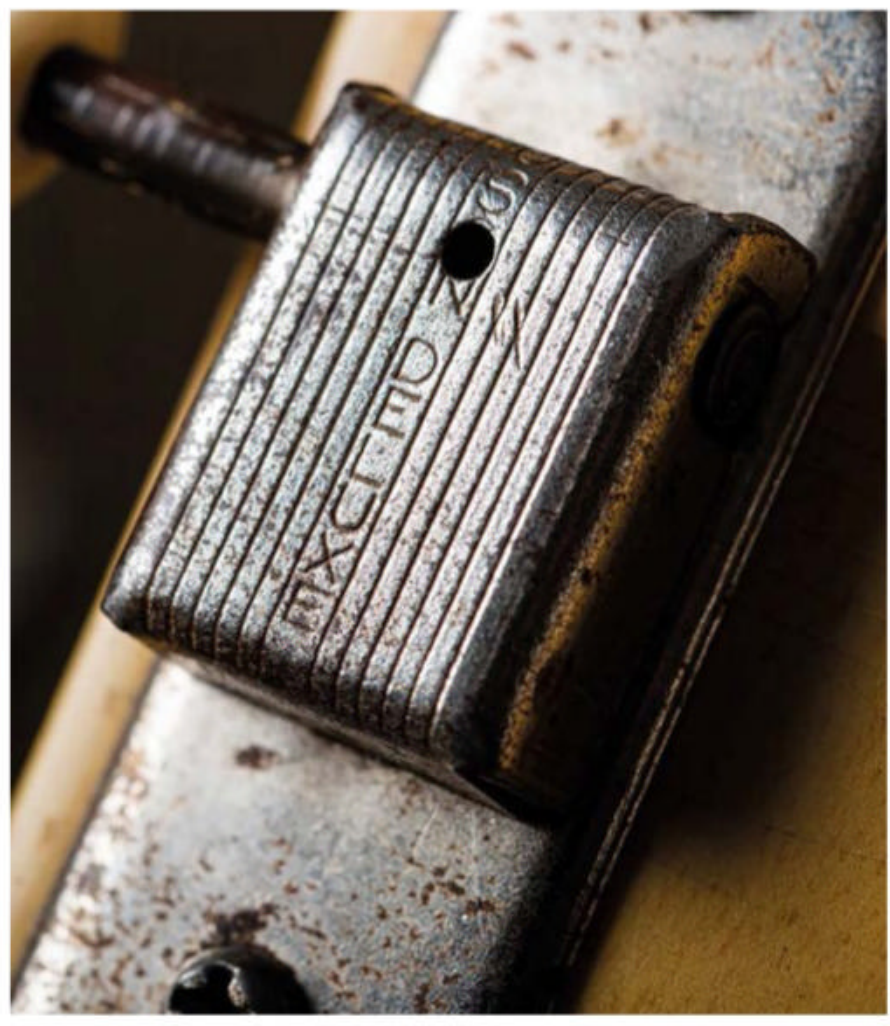
“If I pick up a really beaten-up old Fender Esquire like my 1956 blonde model, ideas just appear. It’s

1957 FENDER MUSICMASTER AKA ‘RON’

This Musicmaster (featured in our November issue before Giles bought it from ATB Guitars, where he sources a lot of his instruments) is another favourite: “I’d love to know who Ron was! This must have been one hell of a birthday or Christmas present for him in 1957. What’s incredible is how beautifully made it is. The V neck feels amazing. They didn’t scrimp on the level of workmanship on these student instruments. It’s very playable even with the short scale.”

1969 HOFNER 176

"Jamie Hince from The Kills gets a great sound with one of these. I saw an interview with him talking about them. You have to get the one with the blade pickups. An amazing-sounding guitar for interesting parts!"



amazing for anything from Stones to country tracks. It has just the right-sized neck – a slight V, chunky but not too big.

"My mind just turns to who might have played it, what gigs it might have done, where it might have been… That switches your mind off and that's the place where creative ideas happen.

"All of a sudden, you're playing a melody and it's like, 'That's good' – and then it's a go. Get everything down in a voice-note app as fast as you can!" G

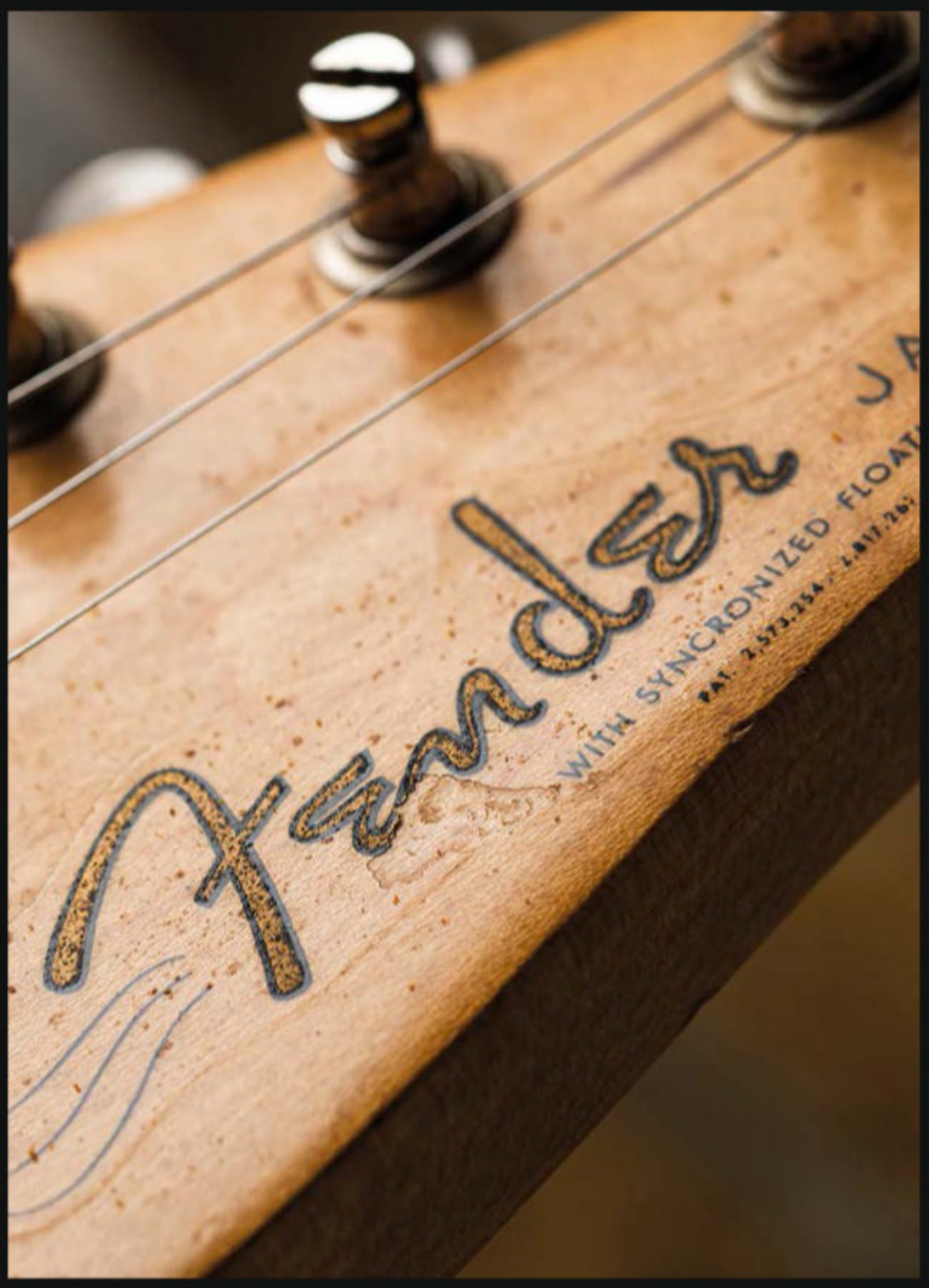
To see more of his amazing vintage collection, follow Giles Palmer on Instagram @gilespalmermusic

ABOVE Giles says his 1956 Esquire is amazing for anything from Stones to country

LEFT This rare 1959 Coronet is "like the lovechild of a 1950s Fender Esquire and a Les Paul Junior"

OPPOSITE Giles describes his double-cut Junior as "probably the coolest guitar ever made"

VOLUME
TONE



THE MONEY SHOT
SLIM PICKINGS

This matching Jazzmaster and Jazz Bass have a storied past thanks to a Western swing legend who was also a golden-era Fender employee…

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

When Seven Decades co-creator Phil Hylander saw a pair of Fenders that once belonged to a Western Swing Society Hall of Famer for sale at Seattle's Emerald City Guitars, he couldn't resist adding them to his impressive collection. But who was Slim Dossey? And how did this set – which included two vintage Nudie suits that were the Kentucky native's preferred stage attire – end up in Washington State?

Trevor Boone from Emerald City Guitars takes up the story. "I took a call one afternoon from a gentleman named Jim Dossey, who was looking to find a new home for his father's guitars," says Trevor. "He mentioned that his father had been an early Fender employee, which immediately perked my interest, even if just to pry a single unearthed story or detail from the Fender golden era. He was in the area so we set an appointment that afternoon to take a look at two instruments.

"Jim popped in the shop 30 minutes later carrying two brown Fender cases – and that's when the fun began! We sat around them like a campfire, diving into the story. As it unfolded, we had no idea what we were in store for."

Slim Dossey poses for a photograph in Hollywood, complete with Nudie suit and Jazzmaster

Jim's father was Warner Garvin 'Slim' Dossey. Born in Brownsville, Kentucky in 1918, Slim began his music career at the age of 16 as a featured vocalist on nearby Louisville's WHAS radio station. He earned a college scholarship for basketball, served in the US Navy, and toured the country with Western swing acts such as Jimmy Bryant and the Sons of the Pioneers, and Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

"Slim wrote hundreds of songs, sang for the best, and even toured with the Grand Ole Opry," adds Trevor. "His Western swing legacy goes on and on – trust me, I could expand but it'd never end. But when Slim's touring days wound down, he was offered a job at Fender, which he maintained until about the time of the CBS takeover.

"Slim was an employee of Leo Fender himself and, while doing so, obtained two brand-new Fender instruments: an early 1960 Jazzmaster with some 1959 components, and a pristine 1964 Jazz Bass. Both instruments were jaw-dropping as soon as you opened the case. However, I went cross-eyed for a moment looking at the Jazzmaster, because it was flaunting a beautiful three-tone sunburst, which didn't come out until much later.

"As it turned out, Slim had a keep-up-with-the-Joneses moment and refinished his 1960 Jazzmaster in the brand-new three-tone sunburst finish at the factory while employed there. It doesn't get more honest than that. It's a forgiveable refin in my book!"

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

Included with the instruments were about a dozen photographs of Slim with the Western swing stars he'd toured with, including Jimmy Bryant and Eddie Arnold.

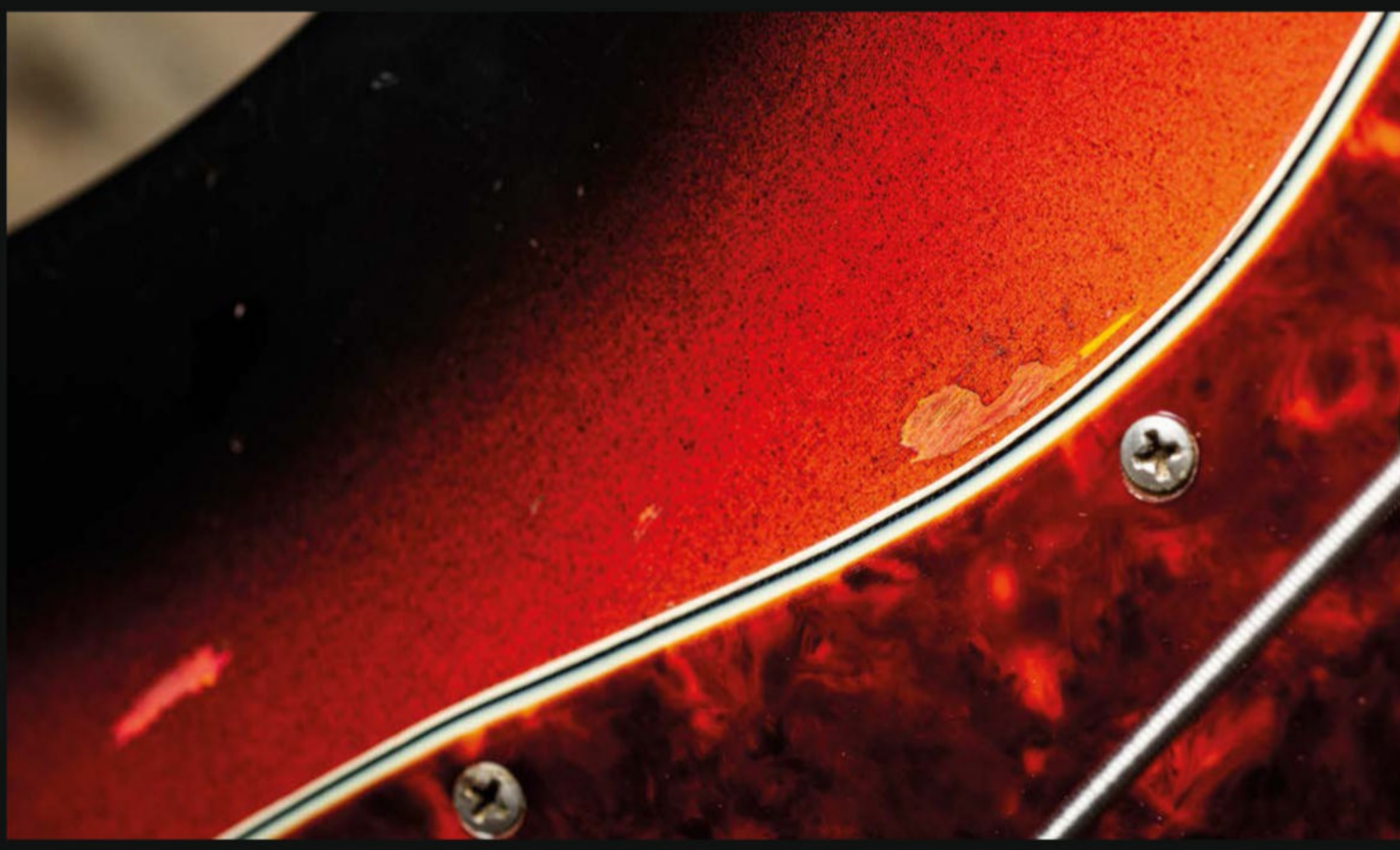
"We were all out of our minds," says Trevor. "We'd spent at least an hour gushing over the provenance of these guitars, when Jim mentioned he was on his way to see about selling some old Nudie stage suits. I have a personal obsession with vintage clothing, especially anything Western from this era, and being part of Slim's legacy just brought it all together. It would have been sacrilegious to separate the components of this man's being.

"The photos all featured these original Nudie Cohn suits we had in front of us. It was a total time capsule. Nudie Cohn pioneered Western clothing, which is still regarded to some as America's only original art form. Two of the suits had the early topless Nudie logo, which in itself was crazy to see. You imagine the early Nudie tailor days when he was outfitting the stars of Nashville in their gilded suits, Slim being one of them.

"Slim remains in the Western Swing Society Hall of Fame and his legacy echoes throughout the scene. It was an privilege to spend time with Jim and honour his father's legacy." G

For more on the Seven Decades show, visit sevendecades.com
Find Emerald City Guitars online at emeraldcityguitars.com

Fender
JAZZ BASS
ELECTRIC BASS



VOL
VOL
TONE
TONE

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

1969 GIBSON ES-330 TDC

Not all ES-330s were created equal. During its initial run in Gibson's catalogue, the guitar underwent some notable changes – the most significant coming in 1968, when the neck join moved from the 16th to the 19th fret

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

ABOVE The wear and tear on the 51-year-old finish suggests a life well played

FACING PAGE Unlike earlier models, this 1969 ES-330 features a quartet of witch-hat control knobs

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,750 (inc non-original case)
DESCRIPTION Hollowbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Laminated maple body, set mahogany neck with bound rosewood fingerboard, 22 frets, pearloid block markers
HARDWARE Trapeze tailpiece, wired ABR-1 bridge with nylon saddles, 5x double-line Klusons and 1x Gibson Deluxe tuner
ELECTRONICS 2x P-90 single-coil pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6”
NECK WIDTH 39.8mm at nut, 50.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 24.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 32.9mm at nut, 52.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.69kg/5.93lb
FINISH Cherry red nitrocellulose
CONTACT atbguitars.com

The ES-225 was Gibson’s top-end P-90-loaded thinline during the 1950s. But Ted McCarty and his team must have viewed it as rather old fashioned in the era of Bursts, Flying Vs, Explorers and the ES-335. Single-cutaway bodies were retained for the more downmarket ES-125 but, in 1959, the ES-330 assumed the ES-225 mantle, and the ES-335 body shape.

The new ES-330 was available in both double- and single-pickup versions, with the single pickup placed dead centre, making later upgrades a challenge. It also retained the trapeze tailpiece and tune-o-matic bridge arrangement of the final ES-225 models. As time went on, however, many of the changes to the ES-330 mirrored those made to the ES-335: for the first three years, the ES-330 had dot markers; the neck shapes were much the same too – fat in 1959, skinny in 1960, a bit deeper in ’64 and narrower at the nut from ’65 onwards.

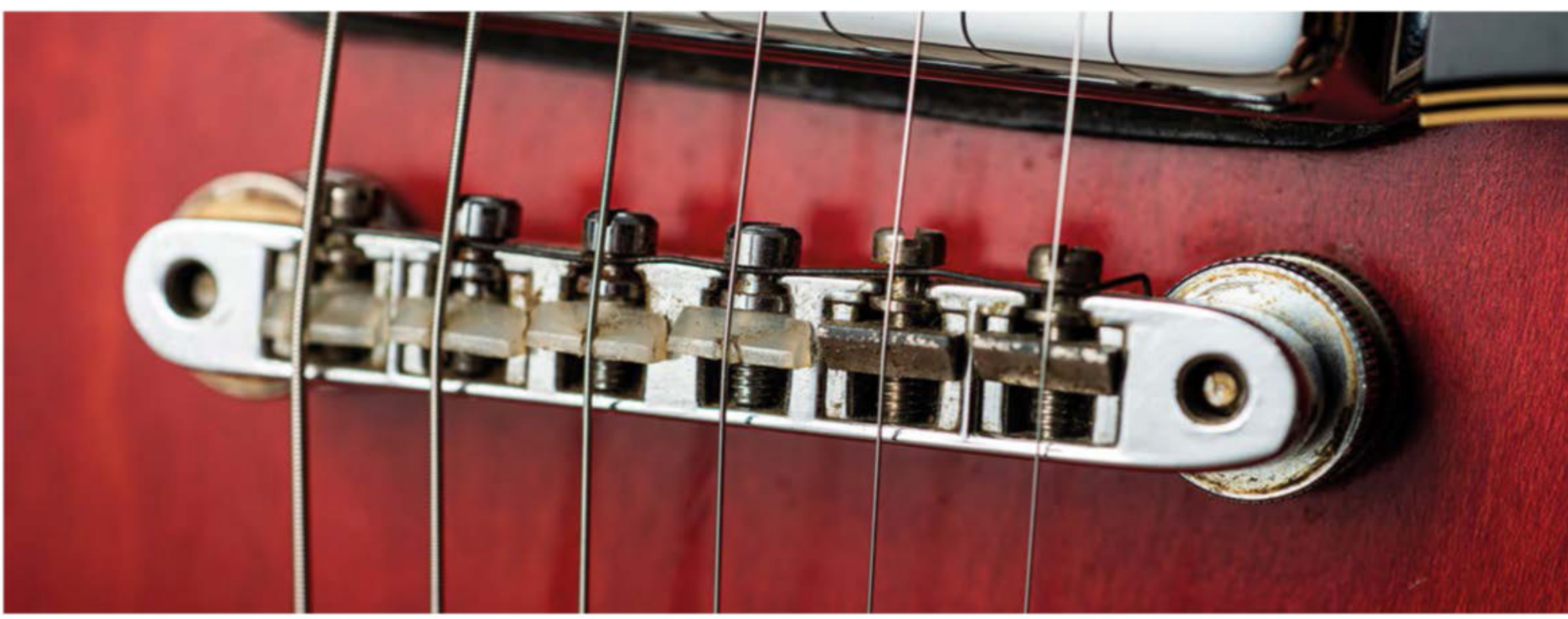
Starting out with Mickey Mouse ears, the horns became more pointed in late 1962, and the headstock angle shifted from 17 to 14 degrees in about 1965. The plastic pickup covers were switched for nickel-plated units late in 1962 and, from 1965, all the hardware, including the covers, was chrome plated.

The 19th fret join may have been an option as early as 1967, before becoming standard the following year. This model – on loan from ATB Guitars at the time of writing and later purchased by our chief editor – dates from September 1969. The change brought the ES-330’s geometry in line with that of the ES-335.

For some, this caused further confusion about the differences between the two models.

It would be inaccurate to call the ES-330 a budget ES-335. ES-330s never had crown headstock inlays, stop tailpieces or tulip tuner buttons; P-90s and a fully hollow body are the main points of difference. The latter proved problematic when blues, rock and psychedelic soloists demanded sustain and feedback resistance. The ES-330 – and its close cousin, the Epiphone Casino – simply weren't built for that.

In the 1960s, the ES-330 was used by a string of luminaries, such as Grant Green, BB King and Brian Jones – and we probably don't need to tell you about the Casino's starring role in the back catalogue of a certain popular beat combo from Liverpool. Despite the fact that Glenn Frey played one, ES-330s were rarely seen during the 1970s, but became popular again in the 1980s with indie guitarists such as Johnny Marr and William Reid.



In the lower-volume climate of recent years, ES-330s have enjoyed another resurgence and are arguably more practical than ever before. Barrie Cadogan of Little Barrie is perhaps the highest-profile ES-330 player in the UK today, and can often be seen playing his Bigsby-loaded cherry 1962 model.

Colour aside, this one is about as far removed from Barrie's as an ES-330 can get. Apart from the long-neck configuration, witch-hat knobs and metal pickup covers, the pickguard is also a different shape, with a steeper bevel angle. The covers are replacements, as are the strap buttons and tuners. Judging from the extra screw holes, this guitar wore Schallers at some point, but now has a set of five double-line Klusons and one Gibson Deluxe Kluson copy. It's been nicely refretted, with the rosewood 'board levelled up in the process. Fortunately, it wasn't over-sanded. The frets are wider than vintage spec by about 0.2mm, and the wire is low, fairly flat and a breeze to play.

The ES-330s of this era would have shipped with nylon bridge saddles but this guitar only has four remaining, with metal ones substituted for the plain B and E strings. The bridge itself sits about 4mm higher above the body than the bridges on the '62 and '64 ES-330s we have on hand to compare. The neck angles are all identical but the 1969 model's bridge pickup tilts towards the bridge a little more than usual. The tops of hollow Gibsons sometimes compress, and we suspect that has happened here too. However, it seems perfectly stable and the action is ideal.

We also note that the 1969 model's pickup spacing is identical to the 1962 ES-330's but wider than the 1964 model's. Here, a 2.5mm shim has been placed under the bridge pickup. This has clearly been there for a very long time, and it's a common ES-330 modification that's done to correct a perceived imbalance between the two pickups.

ABOVE There are five double-line Klusons and one Gibson Deluxe tuner fitted here, though the guitar probably wore Schallers in the past

FACING PAGE, TOP
Irrespective of what guitar they're mounted on, it's hard to beat a set of 1960s P-90s

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM
Four original nylon bridge saddles are still present alongside a pair of metal substitutes

RIGHT Gibson necks narrowed during the late 1960s, with the nut width decreasing by about 1.75mm. Most players won't find it to be a deal-breaker and the feel of this neck is very appealing indeed

FACING PAGE, TOP
The bound rosewood 'board features pearloid blocks, though for the model's first three years, the ES-330 had dot markers

FACING PAGE BOTTOM
The trapeze tailpiece was still common on Gibson thinline semis and hollowbodies of the late 1960s

IN USE

What often discourages some players from buying Gibsons made in the latter part of the 1960s is the narrowness of the nut. If the '64 and '69 we have here are representative, the width decreased by about 1.75mm. The 1969 model's improved upper fret access is welcome and, for general playing, the slightly narrower neck is not an issue. Short-neck ES-330s are comparable to 12-fret acoustics, but this 1969 ES-330 will feel familiar to most Gibson players.

How does the altered neck join affect unplugged tone? With its Bigsby and brass saddles, our 1962 model is the brightest and edgiest, while the '64 sounds warmer and fuller, with a honk in the midrange and more sustain. The '69 sounds closer to the '64, and it's the quietest and smoothest, with a compressed feel and the most neutral frequency response.

These characteristics are also noticeable when amplified, particularly with cleaner amp settings. The gap closes considerably when overdriven, and with fuzz, they all sound much the same. Swapping the bridges around demonstrates that the saddles are a crucial factor. We also suspect that, with some plastic pickup covers fitted, the '64 and '69 could sound pretty much identical to the '62 – Bigsby notwithstanding. And of course, the same applies in reverse.

There's much to be said for the tonal variety of the ES-330 types, and the 1969 model's smoothness, access-all-areas neck and ease of playing puts it on par with the other two. It also has enough of its own personality for existing ES-330 players to consider adding a long-neck version to their collection.

VOLUME
TONE

Guitar MAGAZINE

GEAR OF THE YEAR 2020

2020 was a very different and much more challenging year for the guitar industry than the one we anticipated when we convened in California for NAMM back in January. But despite the enormous obstacles and difficulties that many makers had to overcome – the disrupted supply chains, the shuttered factories and much more – it's also been a year of rejuvenation for guitar playing. Barely a week goes by without a news story proclaiming the guitar a massive pandemic success story, with sales soaring as guitarists new and old turn to the instrument while spending more time indoors.

If you've only recently discovered the joys of all things guitar, welcome to our wonderful little club. If you've been here for a while already, you'll no doubt have noticed that despite considerable adversity, the guitar industry delivered in 2020 in every conceivable way. From the big guns churning out some of the best budget guitars ever made, to boutique maestros pushing the limits of what can be squeezed out of classic materials and recipes, we've seen genuine boundary-pushing innovation and variety at every turn. We've said it before but there's never been a better time to be a guitar player – and our pick of the very best gear of 2020 is all the proof you need.

Best Affordable Electric Guitar

Winner

EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON LES PAUL SPECIAL

NAMM 2020 saw a rejuvenated Gibson turn its attention to Epiphone. The results were extremely impressive and, at just £349, this Les Paul Special is appropriately named. Even forgetting about its ridiculously tempting price tag for a second, this modern budget version of a 1950s student model is a guitar you have to force yourself to put down. With its growl, chime, snarl, jazzy cleans and quacking country tones – not to mention that much-improved headstock outline – it sounds superb and there are no significant compromises. A no-brainer purchase.

PRICE: £349
MORE: gibson.com

Recommended

MANSON
META SERIES MBM-1

WE SAID: "A mean and masterful rock guitar that thrives on a high-gain diet, at a price most Muse fans should be able to afford. Mission accomplished."
PRICE: £569
MORE: mansonguitarworks.com

FENDER
VINTERA ROAD WORN '50S TELECASTER

WE SAID: "Looking for a vintage-style Tele? The Vintera Road Worn offers the best bang for your buck in the current Fender catalogue."
PRICE: £999
MORE: fender.com

ALSO TRY

Rivolta Mondata Baritone VII **£1,168**
Charvel Pro-Mod DK22 SSS 2PT CM **£1,009**

Best Premium Electric Guitar

Winner

NIK HUBER PIET

Rather than launch a Strat or Tele-style guitar, Nik Huber decided to concoct something new for the Piet, leading to the development of a special electric instrument that proves character and mojo can coexist with precision and an eye for detail. There's no shortage of competition in a boutique market saturated with Mastery-equipped offset-influenced designs but you won't find many as enthralling or as well conceived as this. Virtuoso stuff from a luthier at the top of his game.

PRICE: £4,205

MORE: nikhuber-guitars.com

Recommended

B&G GOLDFINGER

WE SAID: "A flawlessly built electric guitar with premium tonewoods, excellent pickups and a unique aesthetic."
PRICE: £5,499
MORE: bngguitars.com

MUSIC MAN SABRE

WE SAID: "A versatile, classy and easy-to-wield rhythm and lead machine that justifies its premium price tag."
PRICE: £3,399
MORE: music-man.com

ALSO TRY

Gretsch G6129T Players Edition Jet FT **£2,049**
Ivison Guitars The Hurricane **£3,495**

Best Effects Pedal

Winner

WINNER
WALRUS AUDIO MAKO D1

The Mako Series represents a step change for this Ohio pedal maker. Here, Walrus ditched the elaborate graphics and whimsical names in favour of a stark, industrial design language as if to demonstrate that its first foray into high-end DSP means business – and it does. The D1 is a beautifully made high-fidelity stereo delay bristling with the sort of features you'd usually find in rack-mounted studio hardware. It's no exaggeration to say that we're confident the D1 is capable of delivering almost any existing delay texture as well as many yet to be discovered. An unapologetically excellent pedal for players who demand the best.

PRICE: £279
MORE: walrusaudio.com

Recommended

JACKSON AUDIO
GOLDEN BOY

WE SAID: "A potential King Of Tone killer with no waiting list and greater versatility."
PRICE: $299
MORE: jackson.audio

1981 INVENTIONS
DRV

WE SAID: "Believe the hype, this is one of the best overdrive units we've ever heard."
PRICE: $250
MORE: 1981inventions.com

REDBEARD EFFECTS
HONEY BADGER

WE SAID: "An uncompromising rock monster with some seriously glitchy down-octave effects."
PRICE: £199
MORE: redbeardeffects.com

THORPYFX
FIELD MARSHAL

WE SAID: "Inspired by the Lovetone Big Cheese, the Field Marshal takes an all-time classic fuzz and makes it even better."
PRICE: £189
MORE: thorpyfx.com

ALSO TRY

Gamechanger Audio
Third Man Records
Plasma Coil **£339**
DanDrive Tweedy **€369**
Becos CompIQ Twain **€299**
Danelectro Back Talk
Reverse Delay **£189**
DryBell The Engine **€326**

Best Acoustic Guitar

Winner

TAYLOR AMERICAN DREAM AD17 BLACKTOP

The American Dream range was conceived by Taylor's Andy Powers and Bob Taylor as a response to the disruption caused to their workflow and supply chain by COVID-19. But like iconic Depression-era acoustics from Gibson and Martin, the AD17 offers something different to the standard recipe that is intensely compelling in its own right – there's an abundance of sonic and aesthetic character on offer here and, perhaps most importantly, it's tremendously fun to play.

PRICE: £1,715
MORE: taylorguitars.com

Recommended

MCNALLY GUITARS PRESENTATION OM CELTIC IVY

WE SAID: "A powerful and expressive instrument from a young luthier who shows a great deal of promise."
PRICE: £5,730
MORE: mcnallyguitars.com

FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC STRATOCASTER

WE SAID: "A sleek guitar ideal for busting out of those familiar boxes and trying something new."
PRICE: £1,749
MORE: fender.com

ALSO TRY

Atkin Guitars The Forty Seven **£3,099**
Lowden F-35 Ebony & Sinker Redwood **£6,120**

Best Amplifier

Winner

FENDER
TONE MASTER DELUXE REVERB

What if there was a way to get the classic Deluxe Reverb experience without the various practical drawbacks of a valve amp? That's what the boffins at Fender managed to achieve with its most ambitious digital modelling offering yet. Coupling the latest in cutting-edge modelling tech with a hefty solid-state power stage, the Tone Master comes in a lightweight but resonant pine cabinet housing an equally back-friendly Jensen N-12K speaker, and there's no faffing with presets or menus here. Simply turn it on, plug in and be greeted with a sound that captures the authentic tone and feel of the original at both stage and home-friendly volume levels. It sounds too good to be true. But that's the point.

PRICE: £869
MORE: fender.com

Recommended

BLACKSTAR
JJN-20R MKII

WE SAID: "Classic tones with modern connectivity and power reduction, and no unnecessary frills."
PRICE: £699
MORE: blackstaramps.com

STRYMON
IRIDIUM

WE SAID: "This pedalboard-friendly amp and cab sim might be the ideal solution for the modern guitarist"
PRICE: £399
MORE: strymon.net

ALSO TRY

Matchless Laurel Canyon 112R **£2,995**
Hughes & Kettner Black Spirit 200 Floor **£899**

Best Guitar Accessory

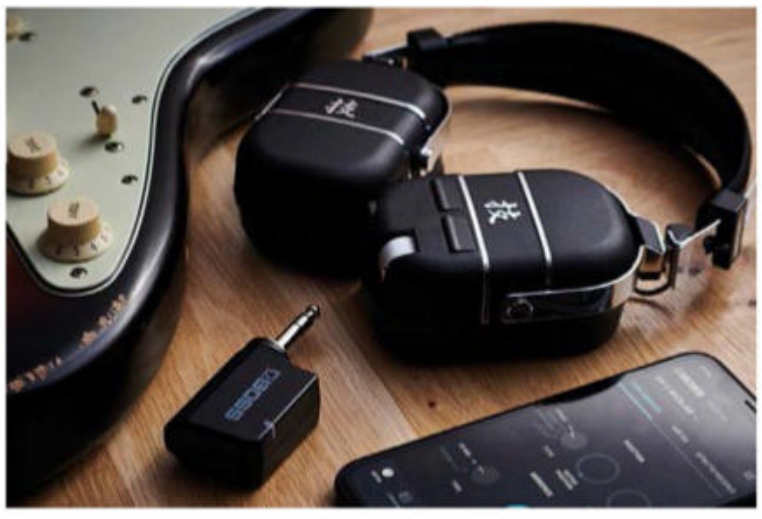
Winner

AUDIENT
EVO 4

This little box promises to bridge the gap between guitar and computer in the simplest and most user-friendly fashion yet. Not much bigger – if about two inches deeper – than a smartphone, this black plastic box keeps the controls as minimal as possible and it will even set the recording level for you. For technophobic guitar players who were bitten by the home-recording bug during the pandemic, you won't find a more intuitive interface.

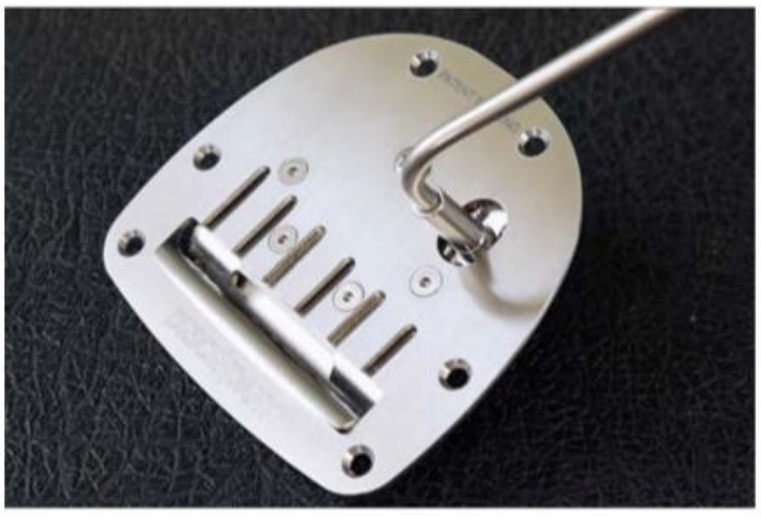
PRICE: £99
MORE: evo.audio

Recommended



BOSS
WAZA-AIR

WE SAID: "The Waza-Air's three-dimensional sound has to be heard to be believed and makes the chore of quiet home practice fun and inspiring."
PRICE: £373
MORE: boss.info



DESCENDANT
VIBRATO

WE SAID: "A great-feeling, great-sounding vibrato that affords the user more adaptability and adds some 21st-century features to Leo's original late 1950s design."
PRICE: £220
MORE: homeoftone.co.uk

ALSO TRY

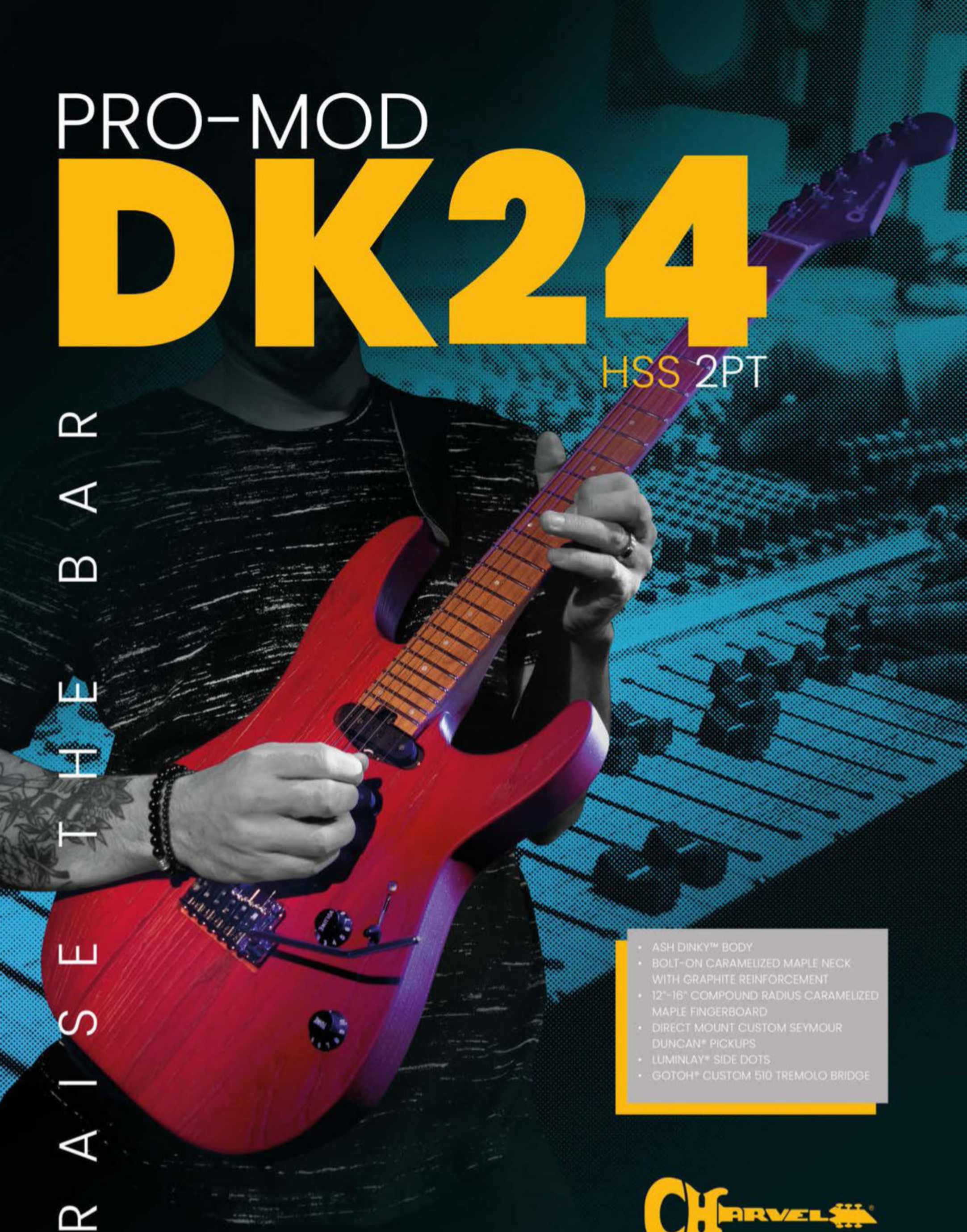
Sennheiser Wireless Digital XSW-D Pedalboard Set **£289**
ThroBak Electronics Koss-301 MXV humbuckers **$607**

PRO-MOD

DK24

HSS 2PT

RAISE THE BAR



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CHARVEL

CHARVEL.COM

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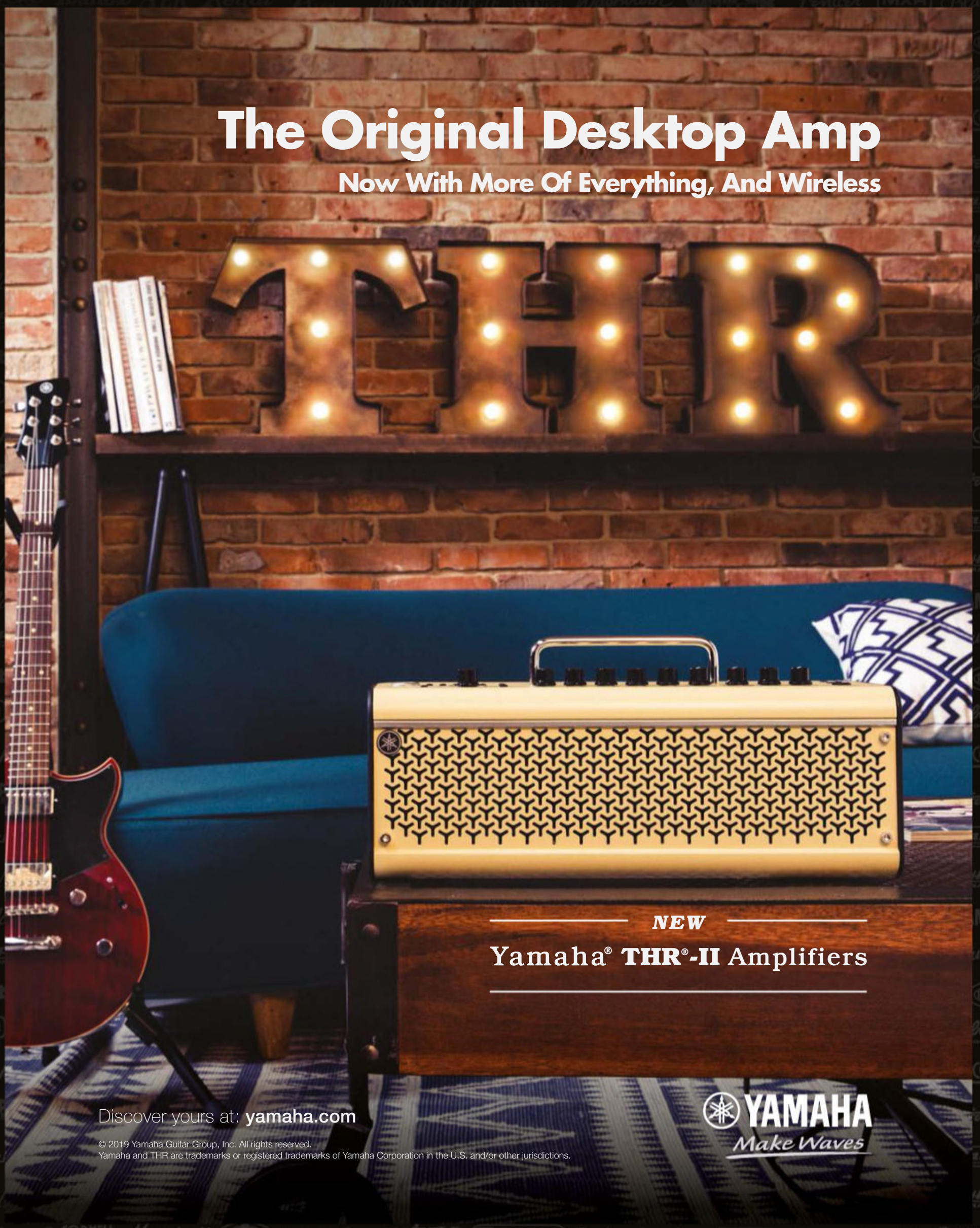
www.coda-music.com



Yamaha THR-II Amps now available at Coda Music

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REVIEWS

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REBORN IN THE USA

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

FENDER

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II STRATOCASTER & TELECASTER

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Do Fender's American Professional II instruments set a new standard?

Comfort fit: the sculpted neck join offers improved upper-fret acess

New and improved: the Strat sports three newly tweaked V-Mod single-coil pickups

Propose a roast: the APII Stratocaster's roasted pine body wears a glossy coat

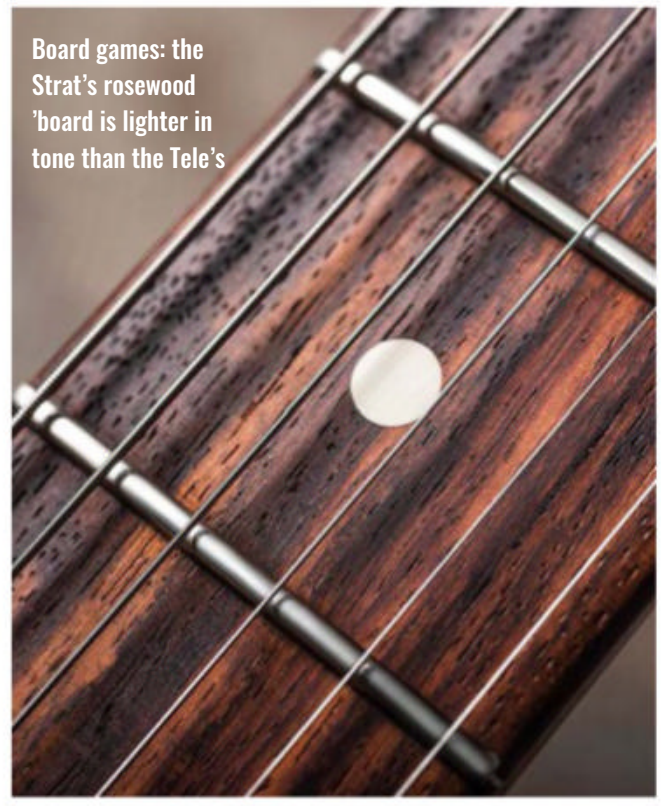
Although Fender's American Professional series was introduced in January 2017, earlier this year the Californian giant decided it was already time for a refresh. How do you launch a new guitar line in a world without trade shows? You harness the power of social media. Next-gen American Professional models surfed their way into view in October on a wave of enthusiasm from artists and influencers, and it was almost impossible to scroll through Instagram without stumbling over someone extolling the virtues of Am Pro II and its rainbow of new hues.

Made in Fender's Corona facility, the original American Professional models were created to supersede the American Standard line. The raison d'être for Am Pro 2.0 is to occupy the mainstream sweet spot between the vintage reissues in the American Original series and the modernistic feature set of the American Ultras. Along with the more traditionally configured Strat and Tele, the new range features a HSS Strat, Tele Deluxe, Jazzmaster, four and five-string Precision and Jazz basses, and even a fretless Jazz.

One big change this time around is that, thanks to an invasive beetle species and the destructive impact of flooding in the Mississippi Delta, lightweight swamp ash is no longer available in the quantities Fender requires in order to use it throughout the catalogue. "Volume is absolutely a big factor," explained Justin Norvell, EVP of Fender products, when the company announced

KEY FEATURES

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II STRATOCASTER
PRICE £1,649 (inc deluxe moulded case)
DESCRIPTION Double cutaway 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Roasted pine body with bolt-on maple neck, 9.5-inch radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 narrow-tall frets, bone nut
HARDWARE 2-point vibrato bridge with bent-steel saddles, cold-rolled steel block, and pop-in arm. Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x V-Mod II Strat single-coil pickups, 5-way blade selector switch, master volume, neck/middle tone, push-push bridge tone control activates neck pickup in switch positions 1 and 2
SCALE LENGTH 25.5”/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.0mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.0mm at nut, 51.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.4lb
FINISH Roasted Pine (clear gloss urethane on body and headstock face, ‘Super-Natural’ satin urethane on neck back)
OPTIONS Maple fingerboard. Sienna Sunburst model also features a roasted pine body (maple ’board only). Alder body models are £1,549, HSS models start at £1,599. See website for finish and fingerboard options
LEFT-HANDERS £1,599, alder body only
CONTACT fender.com



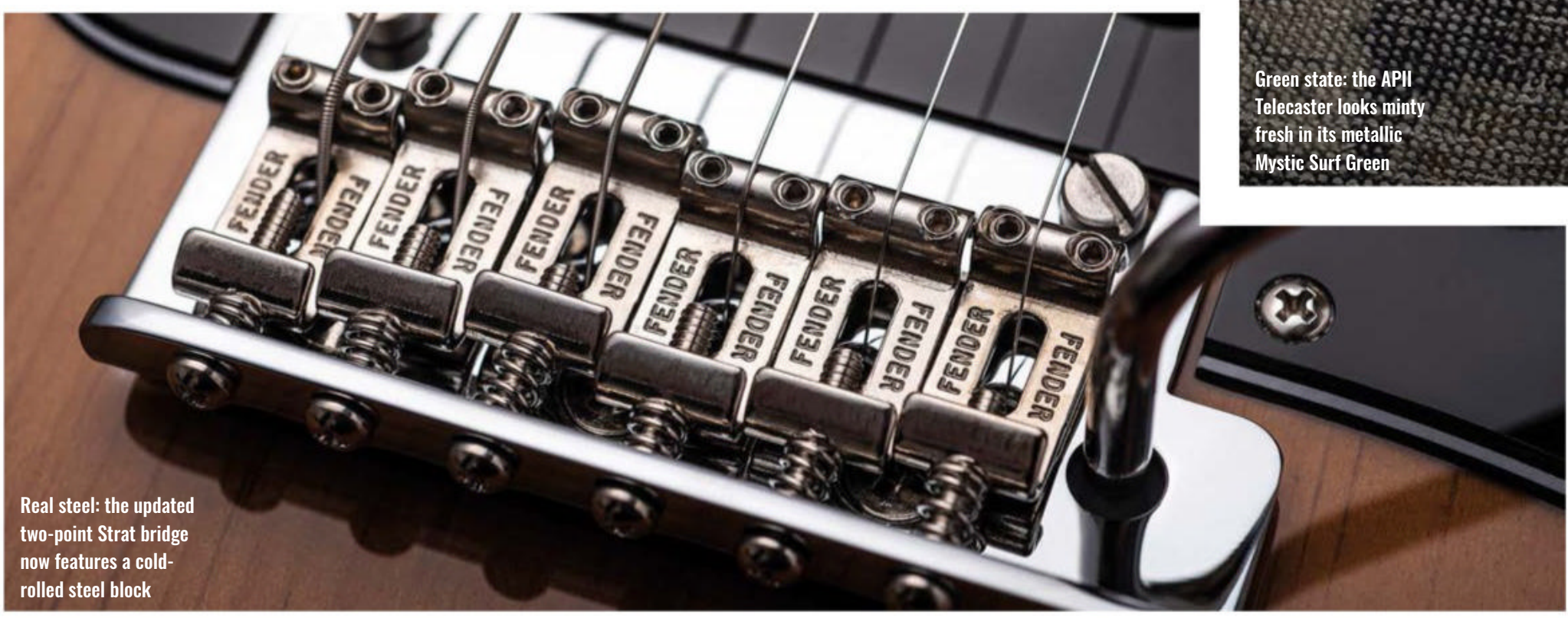
Board games: the Strat’s rosewood ’board is lighter in tone than the Tele’s

its intention to reduce its use of ash back in April. “We will not be 100 per cent out of ash guitars. Rather, we are just severely curtailing the usage to the higher end and areas where it’s a must – for example, an American Original ’50s Telecaster or a Jimmy Page Telecaster. We will continue to buy all the ash we can but expect supply to be more sporadic. We may still build some limited runs as and when we can procure the supply.”

For its second-generation American Professional line, Fender has replaced ash with roasted pine, which Norvell says eliminates preconceptions of softness and, tonally, models more of a vintage or seasoned body. While thermally treated pine is used to formidable effect in the boutique world by Novo and others, Fender buffs will know that pine’s history with the company – albeit sans heat treatment – goes way back to Leo’s early solidbody prototypes in the late 1940s.

Seen here on the APII Stratocaster, the combination of caramel-toned roasted pine and gloss urethane perhaps doesn’t embrace the downhome aesthetic of the timber choice as much as a thin satin or open-pore finish might. Throw on that black scratchplate and there’s an inescapable mid-1970s vibe but, happily, the weight, resonance and playability are not reminiscent of many Strats we’ve played from that era. More on that shortly.

Stamp of approval: both headstocks feature Fender's classic spaghetti logo

Green state: the APII Telecaster looks minty fresh in its metallic Mystic Surf Green

Real steel: the updated two-point Strat bridge now features a cold-rolled steel block

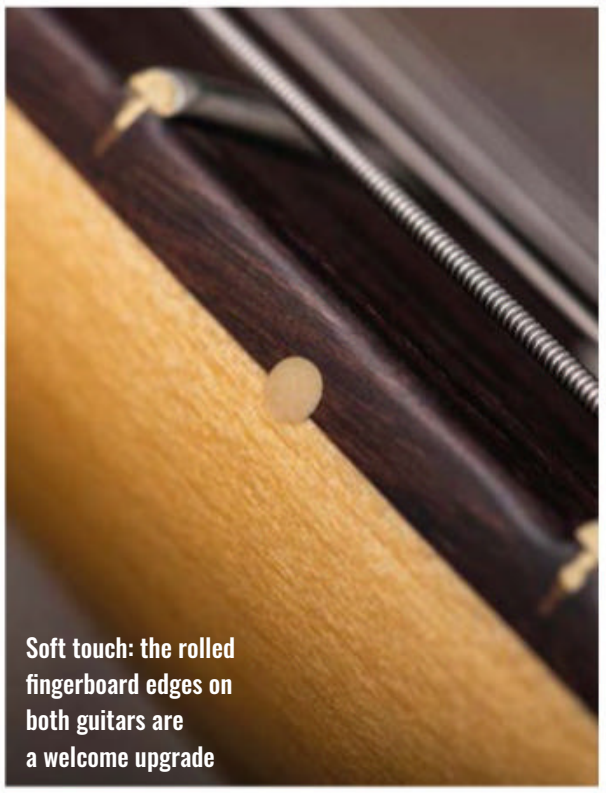
The Telecaster's gorgeous Mystic Surf Green metallic finish has been applied to a more conventional alder body and, paired with its three-ply mint-green pickguard, boasts a timeless look that nods towards the 1960s but somehow still feels fresh and contemporary. Although mounting the neck pickup on the pickguard doesn't look quite as clean as screwing it into the body, it's certainly easier to alter the pickup's height without removing the scratchplate, so it's a welcome solution for those of us who are constantly tweaking. The same can be said of the Micro-Tilt neck angle adjustment and the headstock-end truss-rod access, the latter being especially useful for touring musicians whose instruments are subject to extreme variations in temperature and humidity.

The overarching theme here seems to be maximising flexibility and minimising potential discomfort. This is typified by the upgraded Telecaster bridge with its cut-down sides, compensated brass 'bullet' saddles with rounded ends on the outer pair, and low-profile grub screws for height adjustment. You can also string through the body, top load or use a combination of both. If you've never experimented with a top-loading Tele bridge, we recommend it. The difference is subtle but, thanks to the change in break angle over the saddles, the feel is a little more elastic – much like top-wrapping on a Les Paul Standard.

Not to be outdone, the Strat's bridge has also been given an update, with a new cold-rolled steel vibrato block that replaces the guitar's previous cast unit. Cold-rolled steel is very much a part of the pre-CBS Stratocaster recipe and a common upgrade on newer instruments for reasons of improved sustain and clarity, so it's a welcome addition here. While the Strat's plastics remain unchanged, the Telecaster has been given new domed knobs, and the ergonomic theme even extends to the curved string trees. These are also found on American Ultra and are present on our review models alongside staggered-height tuners that survive from the previous American Professional models.

Mixed-magnet V-Mod pickups appear here in their second incarnation, and both guitars employ push-push tone pots that unlock trick wiring and additional sounds. On the Telecaster, you get the middle position in series, dispensing with the

Chrome dome: pushing the Tele's tone control engages the useful series mode



Soft touch: the rolled fingerboard edges on both guitars are a welcome upgrade

need for the popular four-way switch mod. On the Strat, the neck pickup is added to positions one and two, which gives you a Tele-style combination of bridge and neck in position one, and all three pickups in parallel in position two. In addition to that, on the underside of each instrument's master volume pot, you'll find a treble bleed circuit made up of surface mount components on a tiny PCB.

Both guitars feature a new, drag-free 'Super-Natural' satin urethane neck finish, as well as a more pronounced roll on the edges of the fingerboards. While the tapered 'Deep C' profile is still somewhat misleadingly named, it's certainly very comfortable, providing support where you need it and getting out of the way where you don't. Straight out of the case, both instruments have an inviting feel and the sculpted heel design means that each and every narrow-tall fret on those extended rosewood fingerboards is readily accessible.

KEY FEATURES

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II TELECASTER
PRICE £1,599 (inc deluxe moulded case)
DESCRIPTION Single cutaway 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Alder body with bolt-on maple neck, 9.5-inch radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 narrow-tall frets, bone nut
HARDWARE String-through or top-loading Telecaster bridge with 3x compensated brass 'bullet' saddles. Fender Standard cast/sealed staggered tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x V-Mod II Tele single-coil pickups, 3-way blade selector switch, master volume, push-push master tone activates series mode in position 2
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.1mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.0mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.2mm at nut, 53.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.6kg/8.0lb
FINISH Mystic Surf Green metallic (gloss urethane on body and headstock face, 'Super-Natural' satin urethane on neck back)
OPTIONS Roasted pine models available for £1,649. See website for all finish and fingerboard options
LEFT-HANDERS From £1,599

IN USE

Unless you have a very restrained touch, the supplied .009-.042 gauge strings will be a little light for drop tunings. However, in standard, our first impressions of both guitars are very positive indeed. Everything has been exceptionally well dialled in and each instrument covers an awful lot of

String theory: both guitars feature Fender's staggered tuners

Play nice: you don't have to remove the pickguard to adjust the Telecaster's neck pickup

Easy options: the upgraded Tele bridge can be strung through, top loaded or both

musical ground. Treble bleed circuits mean you retain high end when rolling back the volume, so the tone controls become even more crucial. Although both guitars have a naturally airy high-fidelity sheen, it's possible to unlock swampier, thicker textures without having to touch your amplifier's dials.

The Strat just about wins the battle of the necks. There's a heavier edge roll and a beautiful flame on the bass side, so it looks and feels slightly more luxurious. Set up to float at the factory, the two-point vibrato is wonderfully smooth and players who find the classic Strat trem somewhat angular in performance will adore the subtlety on offer here. Compared to typical ash-bodied Strats, this roasted pine American Professional II proves a little throatier and more complex, with a slightly softer attack. As well as being an excellent all-rounder, it has enormous character and rings like the proverbial bell. The additional sounds widen its scope even further and, in conjunction with the whammy bar and spring reverb, the combination of the neck and bridge pickup is especially enthralling.

Switching over to the Tele, we notice a slight increase in weight but otherwise there's very little to complain about. Although it's a potent secret weapon for expressive late-night blues, it's not just the glorious series mode that sells this guitar. The sheer usable range and interactivity of the controls, in conjunction with superbly voiced pickups, equips this instrument to be as useful at a heavy rock festival as it would be in a Nashville honky-tonk. Over the past seven decades, the Telecaster's remarkable adaptability has been proven by everyone from Bill Frisell to Idles but this is still one of the most multifaceted examples we've encountered.

Will we see first-generation American Professional owners queueing up to trade in their instruments with the quasi-religious fervour of tech nerds waiting in line for the latest smartphone launch? Probably not. But Fender's intelligent upgrades have made these guitars even more versatile, and have enhanced the playing experience and broadened their already vast appeal. Distinctive new finish options such as Dark Night and Miami Blue seem to have captured the imagination of the guitar-buying public too.

Some of these ideas are hardly new but their appearance on Fender's USA production models piles a little more pressure on a few of the more derivative boutique guitar-makers. After all, if you can get a refined, no-compromise Strat or Tele from Fender's standard US line for well under two grand, why would you look elsewhere? If the condition of Fender's USA-made production-line guitars provides a useful temperature test for the fortunes of the brand as a whole, then the new American Professional II series provides some pretty compelling evidence that the people at the company who really know guitars are making their voices heard loud and clear.

9/10 **A successful update that elevates these workhorse guitars into inspiring new territory**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS Silver Sky **£2,299**
Patrick James Eggle Oz **£3,099**
Suhr Classic Pro **£2,699**

PRO TOOLS

EVP of Fender Product Justin Norvell tells us more about the updated American Professional models

It's only been a few years since the American Professional series was launched. Is this a typical product life cycle for a Fender range now or were the updates driven by breakthroughs in R&D?

"It's actually about four years – about four years is typically the norm for each of our main product families but everything has to work out and make sense. We don't force anything. Throughout this time, we're thinking about what else we could do, getting feedback on the version that precedes the new one, and perfecting the recipe of the right combinations of features that make it work."

What are the key differences that people should look out for between the first-gen American Professional models and the new instruments?

"The key differences would be the patented Double Tap on the humbuckers, the extra rolling of the fretboard edges for comfort, the contoured heel for easy access and the all-new Panorama trem on the Jazzmaster."

What's new under the hood when it comes to the V-Mod II pickups and the wiring?

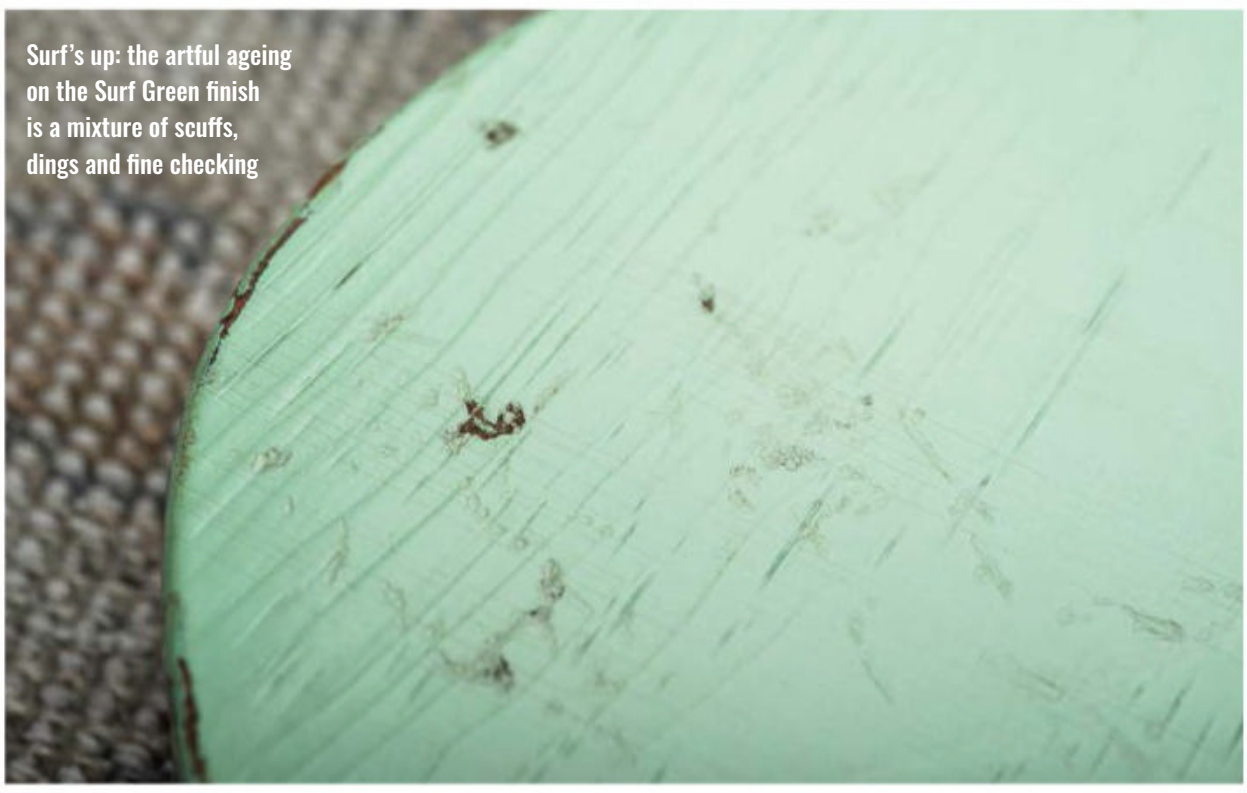
"The Double Tap is new, which allows for a full single-coil sound when it's split. Also, the push wiring does some interesting tonal stuff – on the Strat, for example, you can dial neck pickup in. It's all useful stuff. Regarding the V-Mods, we just refined the recipe and made tweaks that we think make it superior."

We noticed that a huge number of artists and influencers were incorporated into the launch and that American Professional II was everywhere on Instagram. Is that a general marketing strategy for new launches in a world without trade shows?

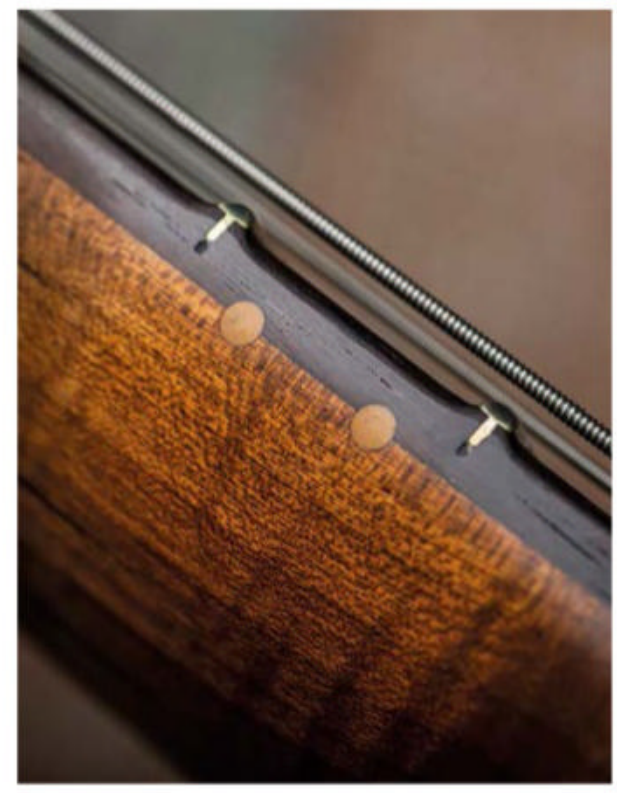
"One of the things about the American Professional series is that it's the most popular series with artists, and we wanted to lean into that and have the artists talk about how they use them. We make our art so artists can make theirs. Our instruments are tools. They are there to inspire people to make music – and who better than the artists to communicate that?

"Fender instruments are so versatile tonally that it's great to showcase that fact via the breadth of different artists that use them – country, punk, blues, funk, metal, pop, whatever the genre, they always fit and sound great."

Keep it tight: the F1 features Kluson Supreme tuners with staggered posts



Surf's up: the artful ageing on the Surf Green finish is a mixture of scuffs, dings and fine checking



NOVO GUITARS
SOLUS F1

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Proof positive that a single-pickup guitar can be much more than a one-trick pony, especially when it's been designed by a modern-day master

Prior to 2020, Dennis Fano's Novo line was made up of models built around the same double-cutaway offset-waist body shape. But back in January, the Novo team headed to the NAMM Show with a pair of prototype examples of something new: the Solus.

This stripped-down, single-pickup solidbody is another offset design but it features a slightly more compact single-cutaway silhouette, with a 24.75-inch scale length and 22 Jescar 6125 frets as standard. Two flavours are available: the Solus M1 comes loaded with a wrapover bridge and a P-90, while our review model, the F1, features a Fralin Tele pickup and a Gotoh In-Tune bridge with compensated brass saddles and cut-down sides.

Although custom options on both Solus models are limited, the vibe is very much of a world-class Custom Shop instrument. The lightweight tempered pine body has a Surf Green nitrocellulose finish that's been aged beautifully with scuffs, dings and fine lateral checking, while the neck is simply as good as it gets in contemporary guitar-making. Thermal treatment has given the subtly flamed maple a deep caramel hue, and it smells every bit as sumptuous as it feels. Gloss nitro gives way to smooth satin between the first and 12th frets and, along with the fret ends, the edges of the rich rosewood 'board have been rounded over for player comfort.

IN USE

Though the Solus F1 leans more towards Fender in terms of aesthetics, it's wired Junior-style, boasting Emerson Custom master volume and tone pots, and a paper-in-oil tone capacitor. The snug

Top brass: the Solus F1 boasts a Gotoh In-Tune bridge with three brass saddles

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,699 (inc Mono M80 gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Offset-waist solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Tempered pine slab body, tempered maple neck with 'beefy C' carve, 9.5" radius rosewood fingerboard, clay dot inlays, 22 Jescar 6125 frets, unbleached bone nut
HARDWARE Kluson Supreme tuners with staggered posts, Gotoh In-Tune bridge with 3x compensated brass saddles and through-body stringing
ELECTRONICS 1x Fralin Tele single-coil pickup, Emerson Custom master volume and master tone pots, Emerson Custom paper-in-oil tone capacitor
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.4mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.2mm at nut, 54.0mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.9kg/6.4lb
FINISH Distressed Surf Green nitrocellulose lacquer finish with matching peghead
LEFT-HANDERS TBC
CONTACT coda-music.com, novoguitars.com

combination of a Gibson scale length, bolt-on neck and T-style bridge makes for an appealing acoustic flavour with just the right blend of depth and snap. Together with its balanced sustain and sheer acoustic volume, we expect great things when we plug into our trusty Lazy J combo.

Are we ever going to be disappointed by an electric guitar designed by Dennis Fano? Certainly not today. Although many players assume that single-pickup solidbodies are not particularly versatile, you might be surprised by just how much range a simple, uncluttered circuit such as this can offer. With everything wide open and a robust pick attack, you get knockout-punch first-position chords with more than a hint of Pete Townshend in his windmilling, angst-ridden pomp. Biting, raunchy, articulate but never brittle – as a power-pop and punk-rock rhythm machine, the Solus aces its audition. For many players, that would be enough. But there's more light and shade here than that.

Roll back that volume knob a few notches and switch from pick to fingers and you'll discover glistening chords and arpeggios, while taming the tone control a little introduces a woody, muscular quality that's ideal for percussive R&B. Grab that pick again and dial some volume back in and you'll find everything from *Revolver* to Keith Richards to The White Stripes.

While truly authentic neck pickup tones are off the menu, there are plenty of fat lead sounds to savour – experiment with the full range of the tone control and attack the strings with the flesh of your fingers at the end of the fretboard to find them. It may seem simple but this is an extremely addictive, expertly built instrument with hidden depths.

9/10 **A thrilling blend of simplicity and finesse, this is solidbody guitar-making at its finest**

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TURNSTONE GUITAR COMPANY
TGE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Unusual tonewoods and painstaking attention to detail combine in this acoustic instrument with a distinctly English accent

Founded back in 2015 by luthier Rosie Heydenrych, Turnstone has quickly become an established name in the world of British luthiery, having found a loyal and vocal fanbase of players around the world. Made by hand at the Turnstone workshop in Surrey, the TG model is a mid-size modern OM-style guitar built around a 25.6-inch scale length. With a 395mm lower bout and 110mm body depth, it's the largest instrument in the Turnstone range.

Here, we're looking at a 14-fret model with a flared solid headstock and a gracefully shallow take on a Florentine cutaway. As you might expect from a custom luthier, options such as a 12-fret neck, slotted headstock, sound ports, bevels and multi-scale fingerboards are also available.

The Turnstone E-Series gives Heydenrych the chance to explore one of her passions – guitars created entirely from English woods. Her clients have a variety of options to pick from, including lacewood, yew and apple. This guitar, however, features English-grown walnut on the back and sides, a spectacularly flamed sycamore neck, a bridge and 'board of millennia-old black Fenland oak, and a soundboard made from English-grown cedar of Lebanon. Beat that for unusual!

Walnut, in its various subspecies such as black, Claro and Bastogne, has found favour among fingerstyle guitarists for many years now. In the right hand, this often wildly figured wood can lend an expressive, breathy character to the note, as well as a phenomenal bass response. These qualities have led to walnut seeing extensive use on both sides of the Atlantic, by luthiers such as Froggy Bottom and Breedlove in the USA, and Fylde and Lowden in England and Northern Ireland, respectively.

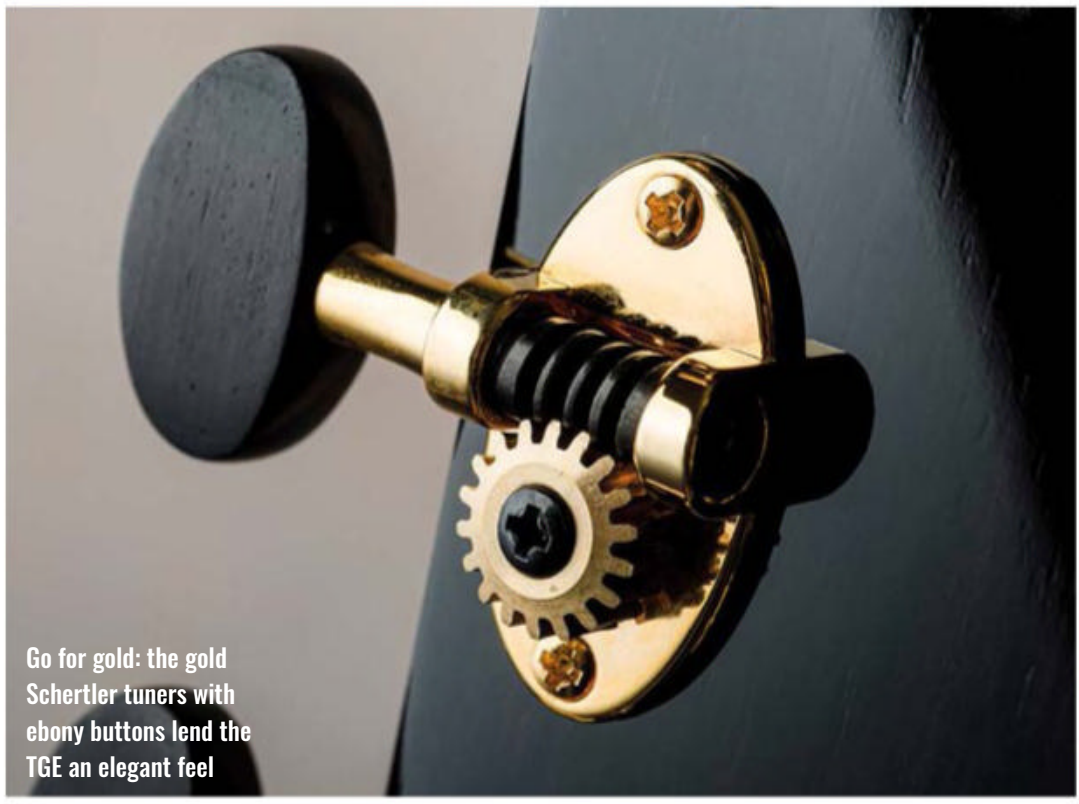
But the real wildcard in this instance, of course, is the cedar of Lebanon soundboard. This strong and fine-grained ancient species is most commonly seen growing in the mountains of the eastern Mediterranean, and is mentioned in the *Epic Of Gilgamesh*. The first recorded instance of English-grown cedar of Lebanon dates from 1664, and the Royal Horticultural Society bestowed the tree with its Award of Garden Merit in 2017. That's all well and lovely but any wood used in guitar-making, no matter how exotic, is no more than a source of potential. How well this wood reacts in the context of a Turnstone guitar will be the real measure of its worth.

At first glance, you might think this instrument leans towards a muted colour palette. But closer inspection reveals elegant, subtle touches of green in the purfling, at the headstock, at the double dot markers and inlay at the 12th fret, and even at the concentric circles of sparkle acrylic in the rosette. It's very well judged. The purfling is butt-joined rather than mitred – an homage to UK luthiers such as Nick Benjamin and Roger Bucknall. The finish work, by Rosie's husband Karl, is also beautifully done.

This guitar feels well balanced and comfortable on the lap, and a gentle tap on the top reveals a lively sweet spot behind the bridge, hinting at a full voice to come. The neck is a beautifully carved C shape, which fills the hand and feels reassuringly immediate. The fretwork is uniformly excellent all along the neck, and the action is low enough to be comfortable with no buzzes or other unwanted noise.

Cedar revolution: the English-grown cedar of Lebanon soundboard makes for rich tones

Evergreen: subtle hints of green can be found on various areas of the instrument



Go for gold: the gold Schertler tuners with ebony buttons lend the TGE an elegant feel

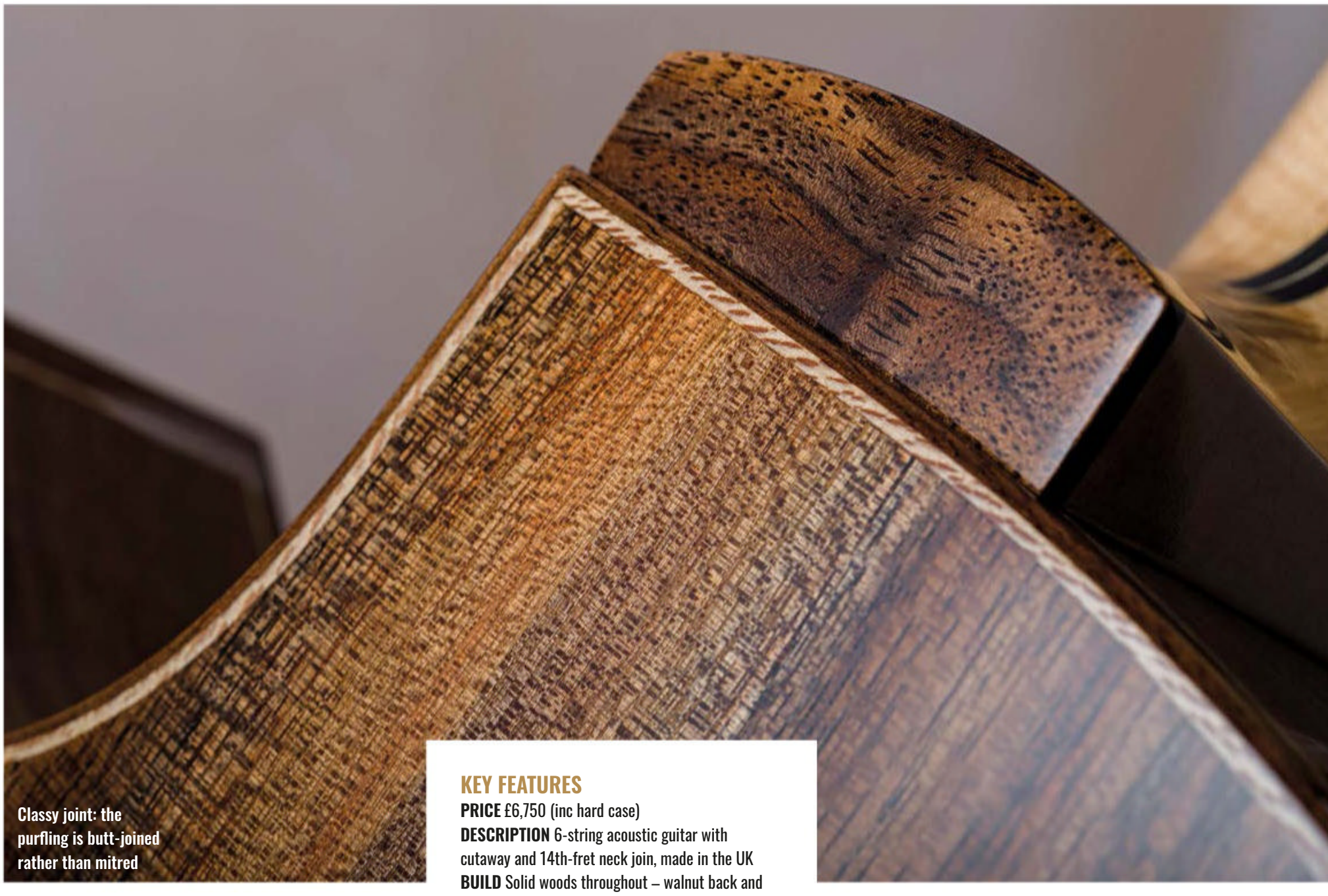
IN USE

Beginning our playing session in standard tuning, we explore the fretboard with a few open chord shapes that reveal an open, shimmering character to the treble strings. It's rich but without any sense of overpowering overtone content, making the TGE a great strummer, especially when accompanying vocals. The front of the notes are rounded and warm, with none of the scratchiness that can come with more heavily braced cedar soundboards.

While the dynamic range of the instrument may not be quite as wide as you'd find on a similar instrument in spruce, there's still enough acoustic volume to get your point across.

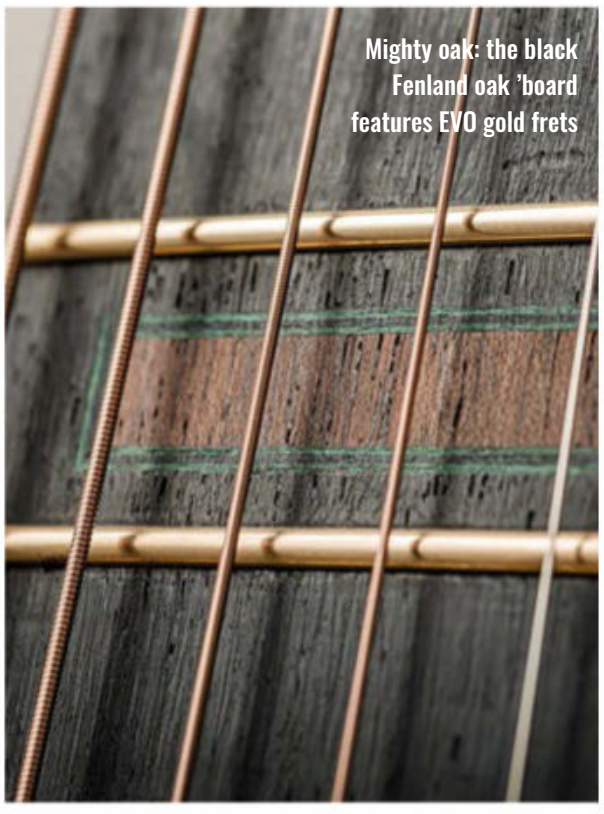
Ditching the pick and leaning in with some fingerstyle blues unleashes a dry and throaty growl in the bass and enough sustain to get some seriously expressive bends on the go. However, despite the fact that the relatively large grain pores of the TGE's Fenland oak fingerboard have been filled, there's still scope for more attention here to help eliminate any extra finger squeaks that could occur when using a wider vibrato.

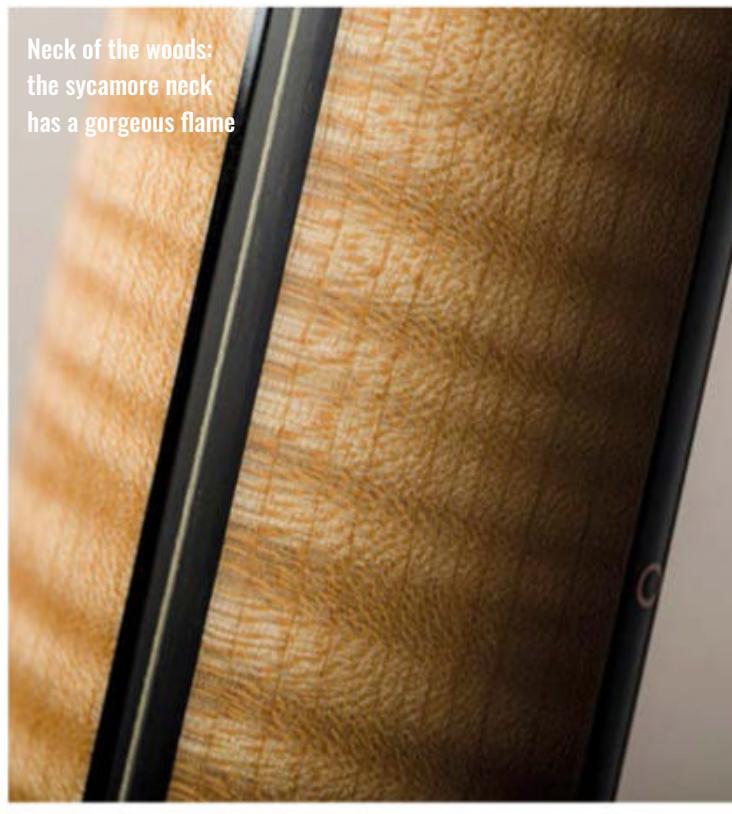
After moving onto DADGAD – which is a seamless experience thanks to the expertly cut bone nut – the instrument reveals why Heydenrych's guitars have found such favour with fingerstyle luminaries such as the great Martin Simpson, who can be seen cradling his own Turnstone instrument on the cover of his new album *Home Recordings*.



Classy joint: the purfling is butt-joined rather than mitred

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £6,750 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar with cutaway and 14th-fret neck join, made in the UK
BUILD Solid woods throughout – walnut back and sides, cedar of Lebanon soundboard, sycamore neck, Fenland oak fretboard and bridge. Bone nut and saddle, bone bridge pins, 21 EVO gold frets
HARDWARE Gold Schertler tuners with ebony buttons
ELECTRONICS Various pickup options available
SCALE LENGTH 650mm/25.6”
NECK WIDTH 45mm at nut, 55.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.5mm at first fret, 26.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 39.2mm at nut, 46.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.29kg/2.84lb
FINISH Acid-catalysed lacquer
LEFT-HANDERS POA
CONTACT turnstoneguitar.co.uk

Mighty oak: the black Fenland oak ’board features EVO gold frets



Neck of the woods: the sycamore neck has a gorgeous flame

The treble shimmer, throaty mids and articulate bass response hinted at in standard tuning blossom into a full, orchestral voice as the guitar responds to the overtones and sympathetic resonances of the open tuning. Complex chords sing clearly and every nuance of slap and tapped harmonic Hedges-style Rootwitchery comes through. The TGE may not boast the fastest response out there but the timbral character of each note remains remarkably rich and satisfying nonetheless.

What’s extraordinary about this guitar is the very English nature of its voice. With its earthy character, it sounds particularly good for the textures of Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, Clive Carroll and John Smith. However, if you are on the lookout for something different, it should also be emphasised that our extensive experience of Turnstone instruments in recent years has demonstrated that Heydenrych is more than capable of understanding and adapting to an individual client’s needs when it comes to creating a custom instrument.

While the scale of British luthiery pales in comparison to that of North America, this instrument and others like it – soon after finishing our testing, we played an absolutely devastating Turnstone, made from Alpine spruce and apple – are proof that the standards set by the likes of Stefan Sobell, Ralph Bown and George Lowden are safe in the hands of builders such as Rosie Heydenrych.

9/10 **Created with love, skill and care, this is a superb example of the next generation of British guitar-making**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Lowden F23C **£3,180**
Brook Guitars Taw from **£3,400**
McNally Celtic Ivy **£5,730**

FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS

FM3

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

All your guitar recording and performance needs catered for in one box? Fractal repackages its groundbreaking Axe-Fx III amp-modelling and effects technology into a floor unit the size of a compact pedalboard

January 2018 saw Fractal Audio Systems' Axe-Fx rackmount unit upgraded with substantially increased processing power, new modelling tech and an improved GUI. It was only a matter of time before its pedalboard sibling, the AX8, would receive similar treatment. Enter the FM3, unveiled in April 2019 but only recently available to the European market. Was it worth the wait?

Featuring Fractal's ARES amp-modelling technology and inheriting the Axe-Fx III's hundreds-strong suite of amp models and more than 2,000 cabinet impulse responses, the FM3 can perhaps best be viewed as the floorboard sibling of that third-generation rackmount unit. Fractal's Matt Picone explains: "This project was less about the AX8, which was already in the rearview mirror, and more about putting the new flagship on the floor, and at a lower price. The Axe-Fx III was a huge R&D project. It had the benefit of all the ideas about how to improve on every previous product – including the AX8 – and we imagined something like the FM3 almost from the beginning"

The FM3's crystal-clear high-resolution screen is a noticeable improvement over the antiquated green and black interface of the AX8. But there are other significant hardware upgrades too. "The I/O is much more flexible," says Picone, "meaning, for instance, that on the FM3, you can use In2 and Out2 independently of each other, at different points in the signal path. The AX8 didn't have USB audio. The FM3 has 4x4 USB I/O, perfect for studio recording. It's also great for live backing tracks, which can even go to their own independent output."

Light relief: the FM3's status LEDs help you keep tabs on your audio signal

Make a scene: creating scenes via the FM3 Edit desktop software is simple

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €1,266
DESCRIPTION Digital amplifier, speaker and effects modelling floorboard with USB audio, free FM3 Edit software for Windows and macOS
CONTROL PANEL 800 x 480 colour LED display, 5x endless rotary push-encoders, home, edit, store, tempo, enter, exit, page left, page right, 4x arrow navigation buttons, 12x LED meters, 5x status LEDs, value rotary, 2x output level knobs
CONNECTIONS 1/4-inch headphone jack, instrument input, stereo XLR outputs, ground lift, 2x effects send, 2x effects return, 2x expression pedal inputs, FASLINK II connector, USB, MIDI in, MIDI out/through, S/PDIF output, IEC mains
DIMENSIONS 281 x 236 x 103mm
WEIGHT 3.22kg/7.16lb
CONTACT G66.eu, fractalaudio.com

The differences in performance between the FM3 and the Axe-Fx III are few and far between. The FM3 has slightly less processing power, and a few effects from the III, such as the vocoder and tone-match blocks, have not made the cut. We're also unable to run two amp blocks simultaneously. Crucially, however, there is compatibility between the FM3 and the Axe-FX III, so third-party content like IRs will be accessible to both.

Roughly half the size of its predecessor, the FM3's sleek and rigid chassis is designed to withstand the rigours of heavy touring. However, the new unit's smaller form factor means it sports eight fewer footswitches than the AX8. But according to Picone, the FM3 still packs in everything players need – and if not, they're invited to expand it.

"Players on the move appreciate compact products," he says. "Without adding anything else, you can take the FM3 and have that core, essential three-switch setup – clean, rhythm, and lead – and fit it in your overhead bag, with cables, a laptop, an expression pedal, some clothes and whatever else. If you need more, the whole system is modular – you can add our foot controllers, the FC-6 (€633) and FC-12 (€876)."

Each of the FM3's footswitches has two functions: tap and hold. There are myriad ways in which to configure the switches but it's common to reserve the central switch's hold function to select the 'master layout'. This lets you select one of nine layouts, including 'preset', 'scenes', and 'channels'. Selecting the preset layout assigns three of the 512 available presets to each footswitch, and we use the hold function on the left and right switches to ascend or descend through them three at a time. What's assigned to the switches is up to the user. It could be specific presets, scenes, the toggling on and off of an effect – the options and flexibility are endless. Each switch also has a colour-customisable LED ring surrounding it to help identify at a glance its eventual assignment.

Turn the page: navigating the unit is easy thanks to its clearly marked buttons

IN USE

For live use and seamless switching, the FM3's scenes are where it's at. A scene is one of nine possible configurations of one preset, and you can program the footswitches to select any of these scenes using the aforementioned bank up/down functions as necessary. Using the software editor (compatible with Windows and macOS) we create a preset for a live performance that features three different scenes with increasing levels of overdrive or effects.

The editor presents us with a 12x4 grid (the more powerful Axe-Fx III has a 14x6 grid), which we use to insert symbolised blocks that represent the component parts of that chain, such as amp, cab, drive, etc. There are four channels available for each block – though some blocks have just two, presumably for reasons of processing power. Should you wish, you can populate each channel with a different amp too. We don't mind if we do.

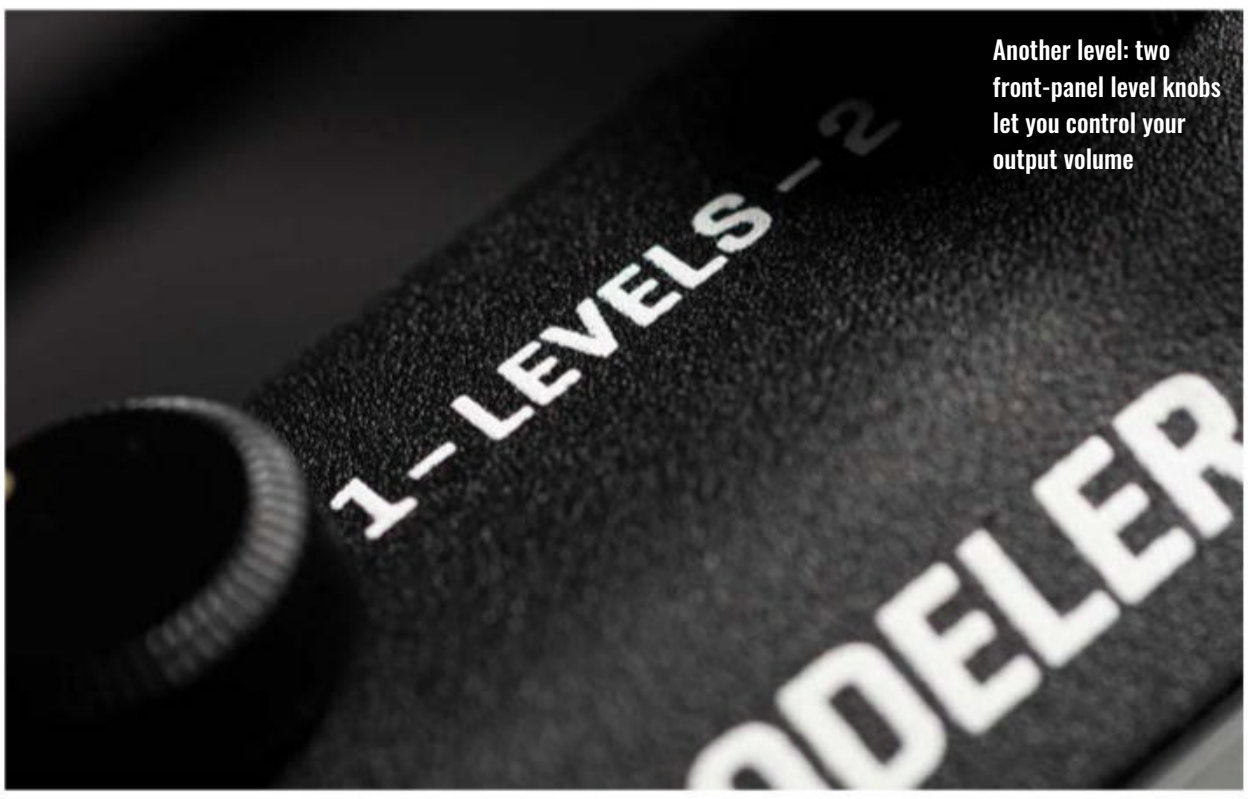
For scene one, our clean sound, we assign a Suhr Badger 30 model to channel one of the amp block. For scene two, we switch to channel two and insert a Marshall Plexi model, and also activate scene one's previously deactivated drive block. Finally, for scene three, our 'lead' scene, we introduce a belligerent Diezel VH4-inspired tone to channel three of the amp block, deactivate the drive block, and activate the delay block for some slapback to thicken things up. Furthermore, we set the volume for each scene on the output block to ensure our lead scene is 3dB louder than everything else.

The sheer quantity and variety of amps onboard could keep us occupied for years. Those we are familiar with are eerily accurate recreations, performing and reacting to our playing in much the same way as the physical units themselves – proven spectacularly when we A/B the FM3 with our Marshall JVM410H. While the tweakable parameters for each block are mind-bogglingly detailed, the presets are sensibly programmed and require only fine-tuning to personalise.

With digital technology present in the signal chain of all but the most old-school guitar players, the argument today isn't so much about analogue versus digital – it's about choosing the product that best dovetails with your needs as a player. The events of 2020 have forced many more of

Ring around: coloured LED surrounds help you identify footswitch functions at a glance

Cause and effect: the FM3 features Fractal's cutting-edge modelling algorithms



Another level: two front-panel level knobs let you control your output volume

us to go direct, and although the competition has never been hotter, Fractal has cranked the heat accordingly. Whether you're using the FM3's USB audio capabilities to get professional guitar tones straight into a laptop, packing it into your carry-on luggage for a European tour or simply using it as the ultimate headphone amp, this compact and fully featured unit has you covered and then some.

9/10 **More affordable and less intimidating than the Axe-Fx III, the FM3 is Fractal's most accessible product to date**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Line 6 Helix Floor **(£1,230)**
Kemper Profiler Stage **(£1,450)**
Mooer GE300 **(£745)**

STRYMON
NIGHTSKY

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

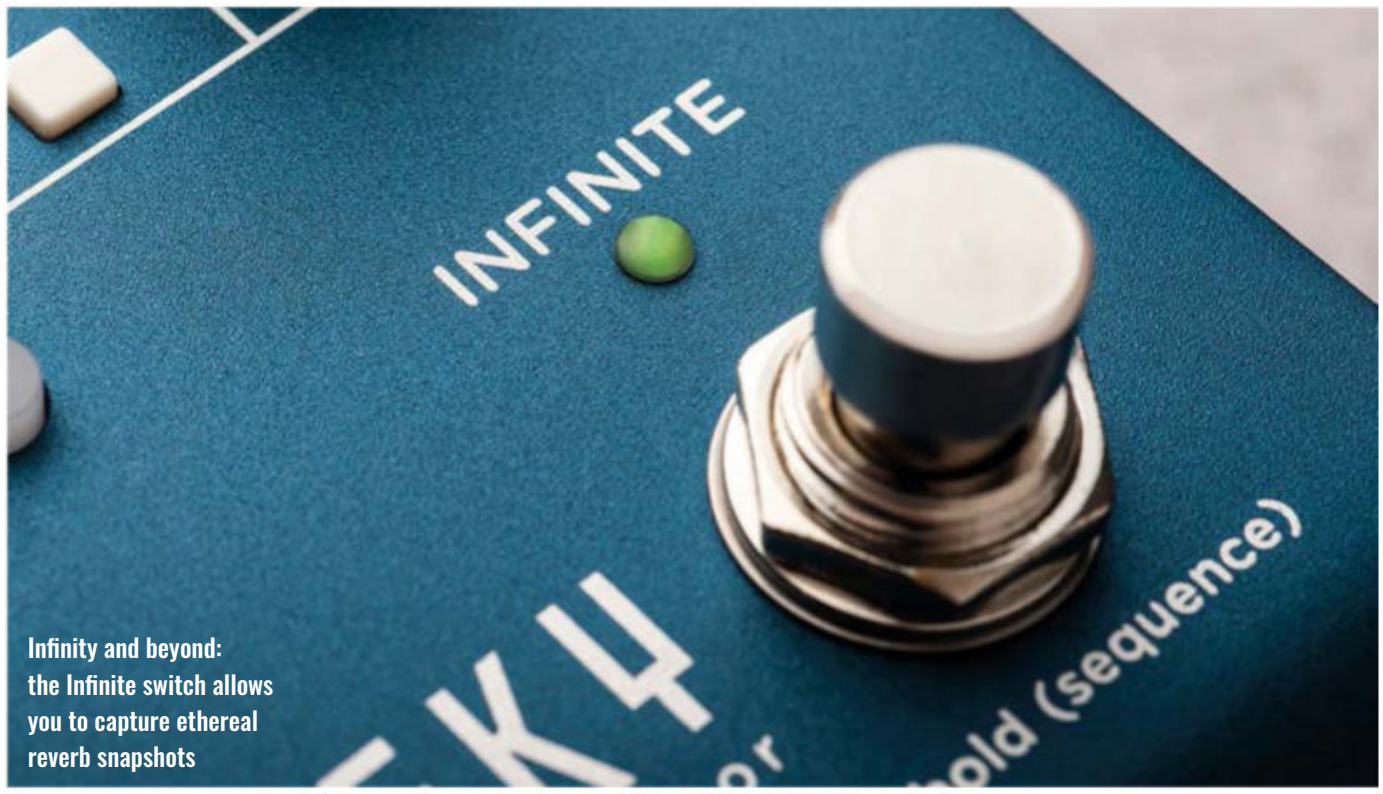
The Californian digital guru's latest stompbox is a high-end reverb unit designed for extravagant soundscaping. Will the NightSky leave us starry-eyed?

Strymon describes its latest flagship stompbox as a reverberant synthesis workstation and an experimental hands-on sound-design platform. This means two things: one, it's essentially a very fancy reverb; and two, we have absolutely no chance of getting all the way through this review without using the phrase 'ambient soundscapes'. You have been warned.

Since the turn of the century, thanks to huge developments in the power of digital signal processing, reverb has probably been the single effect type that's evolved more than any other. Now the race is on to see just how far that technology can be pushed – and the promise of the NightSky is new levels of otherworldly freakishness, coupled with a sonic palette that's now broader than ever before.

This is more ambitious than the much-lauded BigSky, and the challenge for Strymon is to keep the NightSky's trickery accessible via a user-friendly interface that doesn't require an astrophysics degree to navigate. There is a downloadable 53-page manual but, in theory, we should be able to manage with the single-sheet guide to the basics, which comes in the box.

So what are those basics? Well, firstly, this is a mono and stereo device, so for most of our testing, we'll be running it into two amps for maximum immersion. An analogue dry path means your original signal runs through without any digital tampering, and there are 16 factory presets that can be accessed (and edited) via a row of eight light-up buttons – green for sounds 1-8, orange for 9-16 – across the middle.



Infinity and beyond: the Infinite switch allows you to capture ethereal reverb snapshots

Lucky stars: add shimmer and high or low glimmer for more harmonic richness

If you have a suitable MIDI controller the number of available preset slots goes up to 300 – enough for a few lifetimes.

There's an input for a standard TRS expression pedal to morph between two chosen sounds, a Favorite footswitch for hopping between preset and manual modes, plus an Infinite footswitch that freezes the current reverb mid-decay and lets you paint fresh wonders over the top of it.

That brings us to the sounds themselves. Everything begins with the texture button, which lets you select from three reverb types: Sparse, Dense and Diffuse. You can also pick the type, waveform, speed and depth of the modulation that'll mess that reverb up, and then add a shimmer effect at any interval, not just an octave above, with optional high or low 'glimmer' for added harmonics.

Any shape or form: the modulation options let you mangle your reverb further

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £439
DESCRIPTION Digital stereo reverb pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Modulation speed and depth with buttons for target and shape; decay length and size/pitch with buttons for texture and quantize; tone low cut and high cut with button for filter response; voice interval and shimmer level with buttons for shimmer type, glimmer and overdrive; reverb and dry output levels; preset/sequence buttons 1-8; footswitches for bypass, Favorite and Infinite with secondary functions; instrument/line input level switch
FEATURES Stereo inputs and outputs, expression pedal input, five-pin MIDI in and out, USB for MIDI and firmware updates (cable included); 16 presets, up to 300 via MIDI; selectable true or buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply with minimum 300mA (included)
DIMENSIONS 178 x 114 x 44mm
CONTACT strymon.net, musicpsych.com

The filter section offers complete control over the tonality of the decay. Then there's the bonus party trick, an eight-step sequencer for creating glitchy rhythmic patterns. Essentials covered, let's dive in.

IN USE

With our pair of amps turned up loud enough to drown out the rest of the world, it takes no time at all to discover the essence of the NightSky. It's right there in preset one: with the reverb mix set anywhere beyond halfway, this is a warm bath of candle-lit, lavender-scented lushness. There's no in-yer-face modulation or shimmer being added here but a hint of natural wobble gives it just enough depth to turn even the most humble of melodies into mystical trips.

The second preset makes things deeper and more fluttery, using the more granular Sparse reverb type and adding a low octave, while the third preset takes us in another direction altogether with an intense rhythmic filter that's effectively running the decay through an auto-wah.

And so it goes on through the rest of the 16 presets, exploring ever more fanciful warping effects – including disorientating pitch-swoops – but always allowing the dry signal to sit just as high above the maelstrom as you need it to.

You might get by on presets alone but it seems a shame to waste all those knobs and buttons, so let's start twiddling and see what else we can uncover. We begin with a fairly standard hi-fi reverb sound – yes, they're in there somewhere – and first explore the different decay options.

The main difference between Dense and Diffuse is that the latter has a generous pre-delay, making it better for slow-building swells. Sparse, however, is a whole other animal. Slow it down enough and you can clearly hear that it's not really a reverb at all but more of a hazy multi-tap delay. The Quantize button is particularly effective here, as it alters the rhythm of the repeats, which, incidentally, have a ping-pong pattern when used in stereo.

When we move into the modulation section, the strange stuff really kicks in. Dialling in some tasteful flutter is simple enough but it's equally easy to create a dramatic pulsing throb and then pull it back low enough to avoid overwhelming the mix. The four geometric wave shapes all create different results here. But the random and envelope settings are shortcuts to all kinds of lunacy – not all of it entirely likeable.

If you want to get ethereal though, it's all about the shimmer. Strymon has loaded up this unit with full control over the pitch, intensity and texture of the added harmony, with the glimmer function bringing an extra subtle but welcome element of washiness. You can even choose at which point in the circuit the shimmer effect is applied: at the reverb's input for maximum clarity or within it for a more naturally blended feel.

But the NightSky's secret weapon is that Infinite footswitch. This is hardly a new invention – we've seen similar moment-freezing functions in pedals from Eventide, Gamechanger Audio and Electro-Harmonix – but we've scarcely heard it done quite as musically as this. The sonic snapshot is long enough to preserve some movement from the modulation and somehow it always seems to sound strangely lovely, no matter what you were playing at the precise moment of capture.

A long press of the Infinite switch engages the sequencer, which is perhaps a little less exciting than it seems. All it really does is run through a series of background noise pitches at a speed of your choosing. It's a clever feature that's certainly worth exploring but it won't change your life. In truth, the Strymon NightSky exists for one purpose alone, and that's to be the ultimate creator of – yes, here it comes – ambient soundscapes. G

9/10 **Instantly epic sounds in one premium-priced but endlessly engaging box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Eventide BlackHole **£279**
Empress Reverb **£445**
Meris Mercury7 **£299**

ERNIE BALL
ERNIE BALL VP
SUPER SLINKY
INSTRUMENT CABLE
Earthwood
MEDIUM LIGHT
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AXIS CAPO
Aluminum Bronze
ERNIE BALL AMBIENT DELAY
ULTRA SLINKY
TAP
PARADIGM
TOOLS FOR ARTISTS!
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GIFT GUIDE!

AWARD-SESSION
5E3-EXTRA 22

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

It may be a British institution in the field of analogue solid-state amps, but can Award-Session really replicate the sound of a 1950s Fender Deluxe without using valves?

The 5E3 version of the tweed Fender Deluxe is one of the most revered and imitated guitar amplifiers of all time – but that imitation is usually attempted with either hand-wired valve circuitry or digital modelling. This take on the iconic 5E3 circuit from Award-Session uses neither.

You might think analogue solid-state amps got left behind by the digital revolution but, on the evidence of the last Session amp we reviewed – the BluesBaby 22, back in 2016 – this technology is evolving in its own, highly musical way. Now the Hampshire-based firm claims to have nailed the magic of tweed in a compact and lightweight new form.

Award-Session's main man Stewart Ward tells us the creation of this amp was a lockdown project, which moved from conception to completion in just eight weeks. It's a far cry from the long-term marketing strategies that drive many big makers' product launches, as well as a reassuring reminder that the UK gear industry is still home to passionate boffins.

So what has changed to keep this technology relevant? The big innovation of recent years is constant current drive,

which is a kind of feedback loop that allows a transistor-driven output stage to compensate for variations in speaker impedance across the frequency range. This basically means that amps that don't have output transformers are able to mimic the behaviour of those that do. In Stewart's opinion, this is the real gamechanger for solid-state amplification – and judging by how convincingly his tube-free BluesBaby apes the clean and crunchy tones of an all-valve Fender Blues Junior, he's onto something.

The 5E3 Deluxe, however, is a much greater challenge than the Blues Junior. Launched in 1955, this is one of the amps that defined overdriven guitar – a list of its famous users would probably fill up the rest of this review – and what it's really famous for is what solid-state amps are famous for not being able to do: thick, smooth, creamy, touch-responsive drive.

The 5E3-Extra aims to replicate only the core tone of the original Fender amp, rather than cloning its entire functionality:

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £470 as reviewed (from £325 without speaker)
DESCRIPTION Solid-state combo, made in the UK
POWER RATING 22W
CONTROL PANEL Guitar input; preamp volume, master volume, tone, fat switch, 7W limiter switch; power switch
REAR PANEL External speaker output, FX loop send and return
SPEAKERS 1x12 Celestion A Type
DIMENSIONS 465 x 425 x 255mm
WEIGHT 11.3kg/24.9lb
CONTACT award-session.com

it's a one-channel amp with a single input, there are separate preamp and master volume controls, and you get the bonus of a fat switch for chubbing up the midrange – a feature found on the Fender Blues Junior and the Session BluesBaby but certainly not something Leo was thinking about when he designed the 5E3 in the 1950s.

Another modern addition is a toggle switch for limiting the output to seven watts. We're warned that this won't make much of a difference at lower volumes. It's more about bringing on the distortion a little earlier, rather than transforming a gig-ready tiger into a bedroom pussycat.

A peek inside the chassis reveals acres of space interrupted by just a couple of small PCBs and a toroidal mains transformer apparently chosen for its hum-rejecting properties. It's a tidy build, and the only thing we'd really change would be to space out the control panel a bit – that 7W power switch looks like a squeezed-in afterthought.

The basic 22-watt amp is available without a speaker, starting at £325. You can add your choice from a range of 10- and 12-inch Celestions, and decide whether you want an effects loop and/or a speaker-simulated DI output. Our review amp has a Celestion A Type and the loop but not the DI. The tweed finish is actually a £40 extra but we reckon it probably sounds just as good in black.

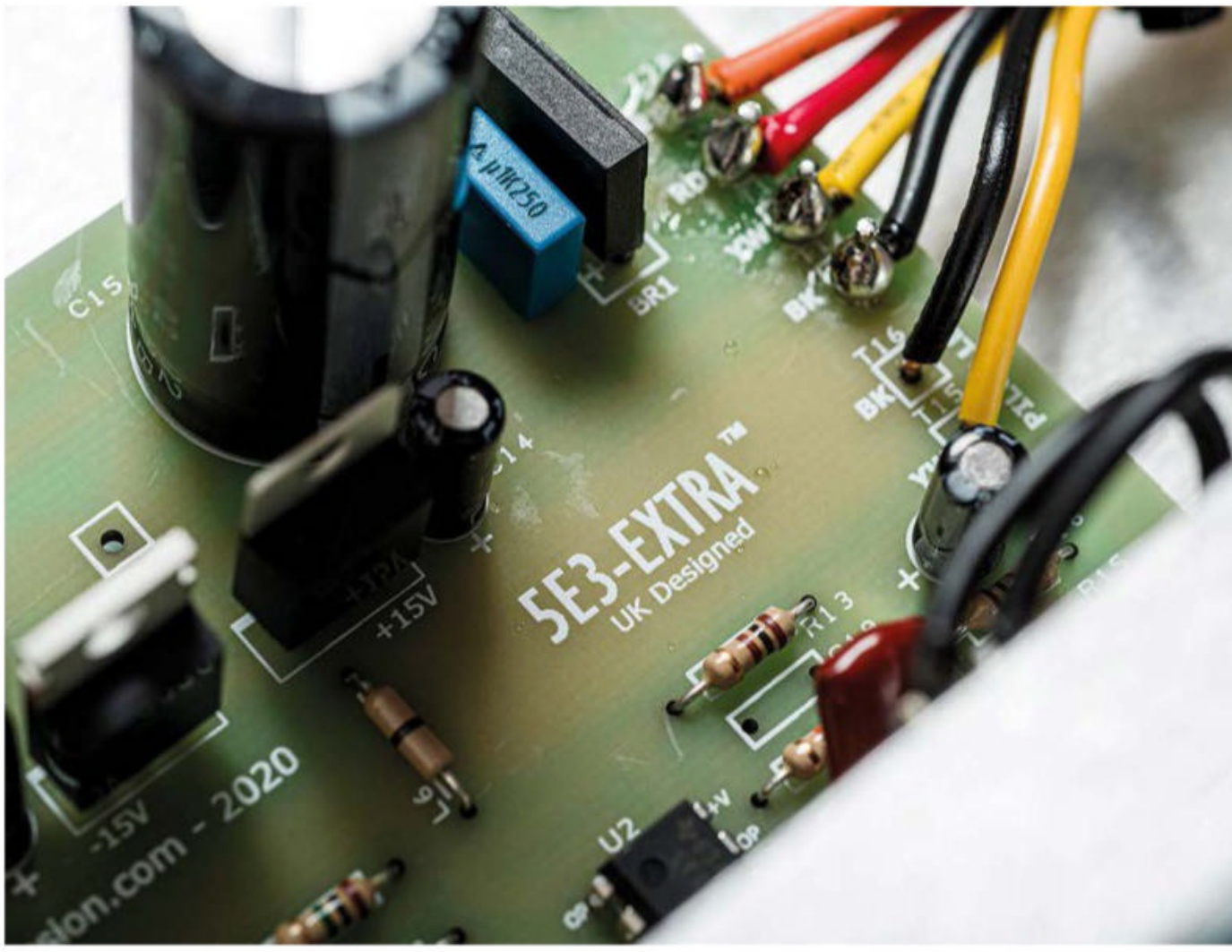
IN USE

There's one more option, a 45-watter. But our impressions of the 5E3-Extra 22 suggest few people are likely to need more power. We're used to solid-state amps with output ratings that would need doubling to compete with valve equivalents but this 22-watter is most definitely gig-friendly.

That doesn't mean you're getting bags of clean headroom, however. With single-coil pickups, things stay more or less free from grit until you hit about 10 o'clock on the preamp volume, but the thick midrange is distinctly more tweed than black-panel. By halfway round the dial, we're into full-on crunch territory, and the good news is that there's nothing cold or non-valve-like about it – the response is firm rather than spongy, and the mids are honky rather than creamy, but this is pure 50s-style overdrive.

Depending on pickups, it's a simple matter of tweaking the tone control and keeping an eye on the fat switch to maintain a clear,

Keep control: fans of Neil Young-style meltdown will have to look elsewhere but the Award-Session still impresses



Speak freely: 10- and 12-inch Celestions are available but you can also buy a speaker-free version

balanced sound with a pleasing thump to the attack on lower notes. The bottom end always sounds a wee bit boxy with chords but that's arguably the nature of the cabinet's compact dimensions and a feature to embrace rather than fight against.

Playing around with the two volume controls allows for easy adjustments to the balance between crunch and raw power; it still sounds perfectly 'real' with the master at halfway or even lower, only going a bit flat when you pull it down to below nine o'clock, which is just too quiet to be much fun. As we were warned, the 7W switch does nothing audible at quieter settings. Only when you're working with properly inconsiderate levels does it have a role to play, calming things down just a touch with no adverse effect on the overall tone.

So, what happens when we turn both volume controls to full? The short answer: nothing too frightening. That is to say that it does get seriously gainy, and if you add humbuckers and the Fat switch to the mix, there's going to be precious little breathing space in the low end. But somehow, through it all, the little Session never loses control. If you're a Fender 5E3 purist who looks to amps of this type for squelchy, spluttery chaos, know that you're not going to find that here.

For us Crazy Horse fans, that's ever so slightly disappointing. But when you consider that a lot of players prefer their amps well-behaved – and that this one costs less than £500 – it seems a little churlish to complain. This is a strong performer and a notable feather in the solid-state cap.

8/10 **It will prove too polite for some but this is a viable small tweed combo at a very attractive price**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Roland Blues Cube Stage **£599**
Orange Crush Pro 60 **£389**
Peavey TransTube Bandit 112 **£299**

SOLODALLAS

THE SCHAFFER REPLICA STORM

WORDS ED OLESZKO

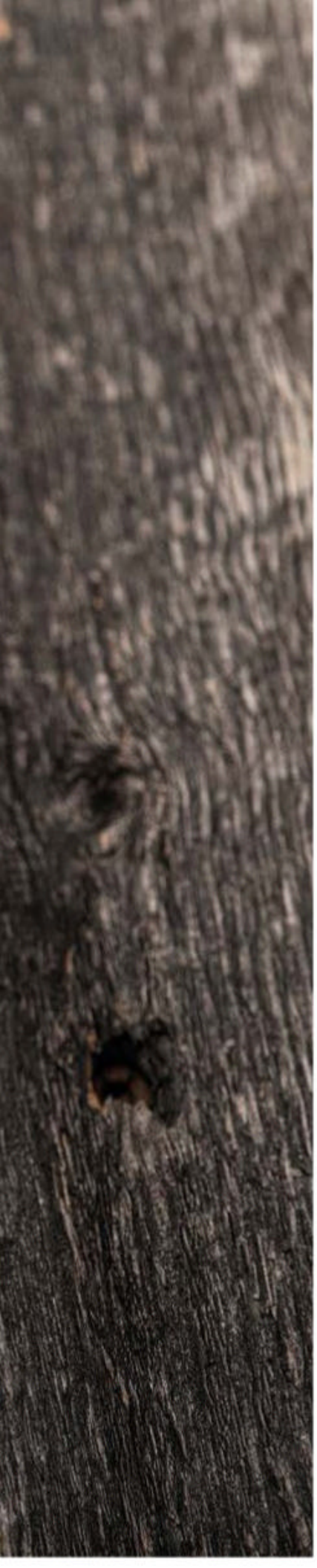
Looking to replicate the unmistakeable crunch of *Back In Black* without noise pollution? This pedal could be the answer

Filippo Olivieri has made it his lifelong mission to replicate the searing crunch of AC/DC's 1980 best-selling masterpiece *Back In Black*. Much research and many gear purchases later, the SoloDallas founder finally figured out that the special sauce in Angus Young's signal chain was, unusually, an early wireless unit designed for stage use that had made its way into the studio. Not only that, Olivieri had found a gap in the market.

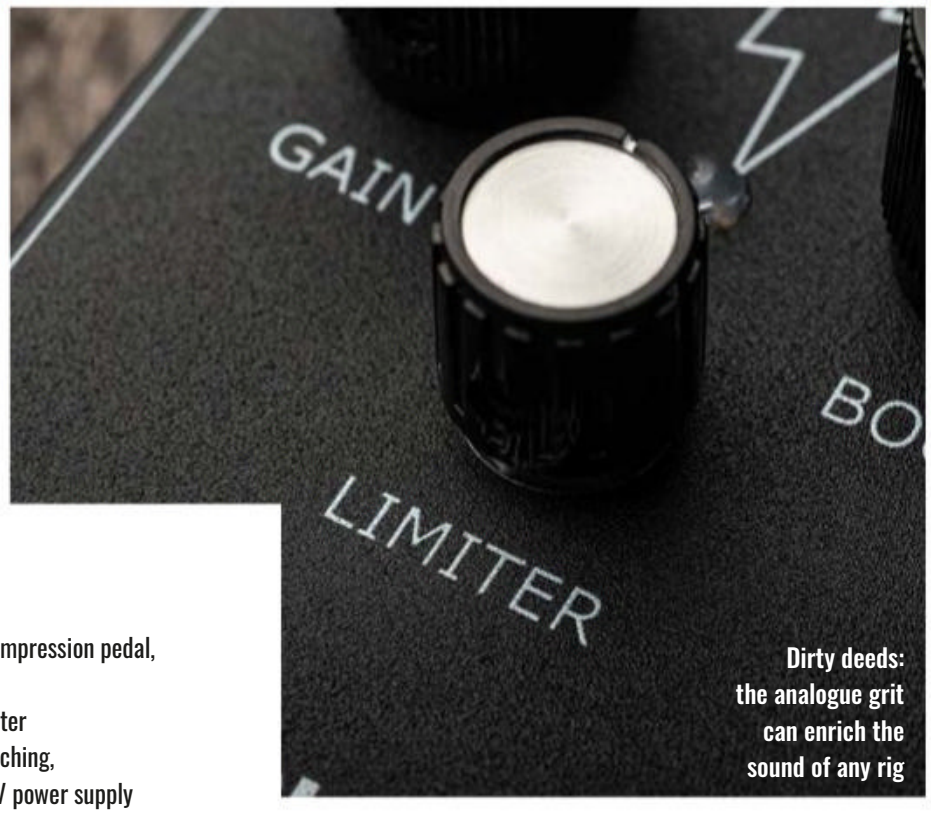
The Schaffer-Vega Diversity System allowed Young to drive cranked Marshalls even harder. But wireless technology had come a long way since the 1970s and, by the time Olivieri started looking into it, the SVDS was long defunct. Having duly sought out its creator Ken Schaffer, Olivieri procured a couple of original examples and set about reverse-engineering them – with Schaffer's blessing, of course. The secrets of Young's tone were tantalisingly close.

With the original unit's complex optical limiter, compressor, expander, EQ enhancement and line buffer circuitry all fully analysed, by 2014, the first SoloDallas Schaffer Replica units were born. The circle was soon complete as they made their way into a host of celebrity live rigs, including that of Angus Young himself.

With the pedal's initial Tower versions coming with a hefty $1,299 price tag, it wasn't long before players began clamouring for something more affordable, as well as a more pedalboard-friendly form factor. With both size and pricing drastically reduced, the Storm is the latest stompbox version of the Replica. SoloDallas says it "features a 100 per cent analogue signal path that is nearly identical to our EX Tower". Time to put that to the test.



Thunderstruck: cranking the Storm's gain will give you lightning lead tones



Dirty deeds: the analogue grit can enrich the sound of any rig

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €198
DESCRIPTION Overdrive/compression pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Gain, boost, limiter
FEATURES True-bypass switching, Neutrik jack sockets, 9V-12V power supply (DC 2.1mm centre-negative) only
DIMENSIONS 64 x 119 x 39mm
CONTACT eu.solodallas-shop.com

IN USE

Unfortunately, our lockdown diet means we can't quite squeeze into our old school uniform but, at least the Storm – with its metal enclosure, true-bypass footswitch, Neutrik jack sockets and all-analogue circuitry – is ready to rock. You can have any colour too, as long as it's black.

The pedal's gain and boost controls are self-explanatory, while the third knob, labelled limiter, governs an optical compressor circuit.

Donning a PAF-loaded Gibson, we plug into a 1968 100-watt Marshall Plexi and a greenback-loaded cab – and crank it up. Stepping on the pedal, we're impressed at the Storm's ability to refine and enhance our already spectacular Plexi tone. With the pedal's gain set low and its boost and limiter controls halfway, the raw, harmonically rich amp tone is enriched with a gritty drive, while velvet-smooth optical compression adds sustain, bloom and girth to our notes. There's volume increase aplenty via the 25dB boost, and upping the gain delivers scorching leads with a unique feel.

The Storm provides much of what a good engineer might in a recording studio to add polish and punch: compression, analogue grit and EQ. But the real surprise is how good the unit sounds out of its assumed comfort zone. With a maple-neck Tele into a clean black-panel Fender amp, we start to think of this pedal more as a compressor with added gain controls. The smooth, warm boost and slightly gritty overdrive textures have more in common with pedals based on recording console preamps than TS-style overdrives.

This unit can bring you closer to Young's tone than ever before, but don't dismiss it as a pedal for AC/DC obsessives only. Whether you are one of those about to rock or simply looking for unusual drive and/or compression textures, this unit is worth saluting.

8/10 **Though it ticks the box for *Back In Black* tones, there are plenty more shades to this sophisticated stompbox's palette**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Hudson Electronics Broadcast **£165**
Greer Lamplighter **$219**
Strymon Compadre **£249**

VOLUME

PHUZZ

SILICON

PHUZZ

INPUT

OUTPUT

9V DC

PHIL ROBINSON ADVANCED CIRCUITRY

Fuzz word: the Phuzz's sound quality is sturdy even as we chain more effects together

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £169
DESCRIPTION Hand-wired silicon fuzz pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Volume, Phuzz, on/off footswitch
FEATURES 9V DC mains power only. Fully smoothed power section, reverse-polarity protection, RF rejection circuitry
DIMENSIONS 65 x 119 x 54mm
CONTACT philrobinsonfxpedals.co.uk

PHIL ROBINSON ADVANCED CIRCUITRY

SILICON PHUZZ

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

This hand-made modern-day take on expressive fuzz is inspired by vintage David Gilmour tones, which gives us high hopes indeed

The work of one Mr Gilmour had a bracing effect on British engineer Phil Robinson's formative guitar years, inspiring a deep exploration of vintage effects and Hiwatt amps in the hopes of approaching the tones of those early Pink Floyd recordings. This research revealed not only the joy of vintage Face-style fuzzes but also the inevitable inconsistencies and noise that come when awakening the ancient ones to play with more modern buffered effects.

Robinson recently launched his first pedal, the Silicon Phuzz, a single-berth twin-knob pedal that aims to bring back the joy of early fuzz tones without the accompanying challenges. To this end, the Silicon Phuzz features a fully smoothed power section that ensures no power supply noise is amplified, clever reverse-polarity protection rendering it impossible to kill by using the wrong power adaptor – which has fried many a vintage-style fuzz pedal – and RF rejection circuitry that ensures no radio frequencies are picked up via the amplifier. All of this happens without affecting the clean-up characteristics of the pedal too.

Vitally, Robinson has also developed a unique unity gain output stage, which completely isolates the Phuzz circuitry from any active electronics that follow it. This allows the true nature of the Phuzz to come through untrammelled, whatever you run after it. It also means a higher output than you might expect from this breed of fuzz, as well as the ability to use longer cable lengths with no detrimental effect on well, your effects.

IN USE

A word to the wise: unless you're actively courting a flatulent and gasping tone, then a modern everything-at-noon starting point won't work here. Robinson recommends you kick off with the Phuzz on full while you dial in the volume knob to suit your own proceedings. Dutifully, we do exactly that with a Gretsch White Falcon running into an early Cornford Hurricane.

The resulting sound reminds us that there is so much more to fuzz than the latest play-school-painted Muff clone. The guitar immediately springs to life with a frankly sensational combination of overdrive with a sizzling top end of fuzz. Dialling back the volume knob just a touch takes us into that rare sweet spot of true low-gain fuzz chords – it's a heady place that's not usually experienced outside of vintage units, and it is *wonderful*.

When adding more effects to our chain, there's no change to the quality of sound – there are no brittle highs, no hollow mids and no muddy bass. Instead, Robinson's pedal manages to retain its characteristic elegance even when lovingly smeared with delay, Uni-Vibe and wah, which encourages players to find the erogenous notes and hold on tight. There's a huge market for fuzz at the moment but, regardless of genre, the Silicon Phuzz deserves a place at the top of the lower-gain sector.

9/10 **With vintage sounds and modern performance, this may be the ultimate fuzz for early Floyd tones**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

1981 Inventions DRV **£250**
Beetronics Royal Jelly **£289**
Vemuram Josh Smith Myriad Fuzz **£399**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £119
DESCRIPTION 2.4GHz wireless system, made in China
FEATURES 4 channels, 90ft range, 5 hours battery life, rechargeable lithium battery power (USB charging cable included)
CONTACT mooeraudio.co.uk

MOOER AIR P10

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Wireless systems used to be reserved for gigging musicians but more and more players are finding them useful at home. How does this affordable low-profile system from Mooer stack up?

For the past decade, Mooer has been serving up punchy small-scale effects with an emphasis on innovative features and sound quality. Its latest offering, the company's first venture in this arena, is the Air P10 2.4GHz wireless system, which aims to make your cable-based woes a thing of the past.

Today's wireless systems are an enormous improvement on those of old, with negligible weight and improved user-friendliness, as well as a resistance to interfering frequencies that minimises the risk of embarrassing Spinal Tap-style wireless disasters. The Air P10 system comprises two parts, a transmitter that plugs into your guitar, and a receiver that plugs into your amplifier, pedalboard or audio interface. So far, so simple.

With semi-translucent plastic cases that have something of a Tamagotchi vibe about them, the two units are visually identical except for a colour-coded label and tiny lettering denoting their respective jobs. That's all well and good in broad daylight but in the heat of battle and under stage lights, it may not be enough to avoid confusion. We would've welcomed a tactile difference too.

Both units run off an internal rechargeable lithium battery that offers an industry standard five hours of life, and the bundled USB charging cable provides twin plugs, allowing you to charge both units at the same time. Good thinking.

While Mooer recommends keeping the receiver at least three metres away from any sources of potential interference such as wifi routers, we don't experience any problems at a closer range, which may be good news for streaming musicians looking to keep their cable management simple.

IN USE

Plugging in and making loud noises happens in an instant, with the Air P10's transmitter and receiver linking up automatically. There are four individual channels, so you can link multiple instruments to the same receiver too. The units' plastic construction keeps the weight down, and we're confident that even expressive shape-throwing won't lead to the transmitter working its way out of a jack socket.

The Air P10 boasts an impressive range of 90 feet, which we test with some street-based riffage. Despite the distance and the intervening walls, the sound quality – with less than 5 milliseconds of latency – is close to that experienced when going straight into the amp with a short lead. Adding a pedalboard to the chain does mean the front end of notes have a slightly spongy feel, which is less noticeable with electric guitars but more pronounced when using an acoustic guitar fitted with a K&K soundboard pickup.

Anyone considering a wireless system is surely looking for ease of use, reliability of performance, and good sound quality. The Air P10 performs strongly in all these areas, and comes at an accessible price point.

8/10 **A nifty little wireless system offering good performance and a great price**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Behringer Airplay Guitar ULG10 **£73**
Boss WL-20 Wireless System **£145**
Sennheiser XSW-D Instrument Base Set **£259**

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SET OF THREE

TunaTone founder Leila Sidi with an in-progress Barituna baritone model

The short-scale Teeny Tuna features a lightweight spruce or poplar body

INDUSTRY INSIDER

TUNATONE INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Edmonton's TunaTone is committed to pushing the boundaries of what short-scale instruments are capable of. But the creator of these exquisitely crafted instruments, Leila Sidi, isn't even a guitar player. We meet an exciting but entirely different kind of luthier

How did you get into guitar?

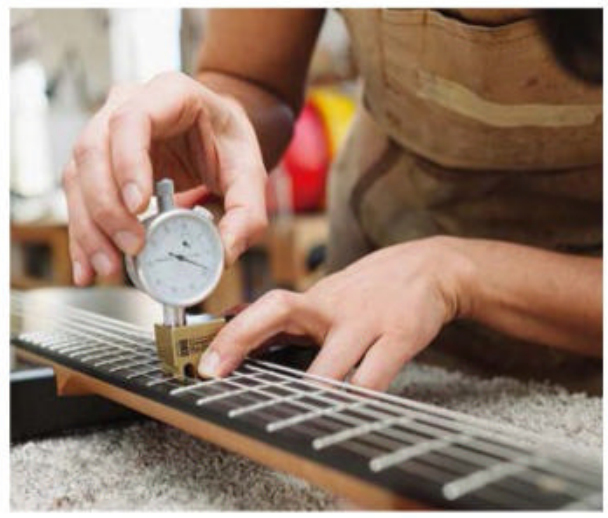
"I have yet to get into playing the guitar, which feels a little strange. But I've come to learn that that's actually given me a unique perspective as both a designer and builder. I entered into luthiery through woodworking. I was working with furniture builder Brad Geortz, of the Inside Passage School of Fine Woodwork, for a number of years before building my first guitar. When he moved onto other pursuits, I asked our shop mate and friend Dion James of Dion Guitars whether he would help me build an electric guitar. He graciously did – and I have been building guitars under his tutelage since. I've been building guitars for nearly five years now. My first instrument was a short-scale bass, a copy of a 1969 Fender Musicmaster. It was a beautiful instrument that also had inherent flaws that affected playability. My goal was to replicate the bass while improving upon the imperfections that were built into its design. I realised that building guitars had a level of complexity, detail and variety in the process that I really liked and so I continued. My next guitar was a baritone, a gift to Dion for his mentorship. It was my first ground-up design and heavily informed my primary model, the Teeny Tuna."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"Handmade guitars involve a lot of time, skill and labour and, in an economic system that is based on mass production and constant consumption, it's hard to feel like hand-building instruments is a viable business model at all. But what I've found is that there are people just like myself who deeply value being let into the process. My clients are able to watch the build, get to know the person doing the work and trust that thoughtful decisions have been made every step of the way. As a result, people get to develop a uniquely special relationship with their instrument. My hope is that that feeling of connection translates into how a person feels inspired to play."

Did you have any external support starting out?

"I have built my business slowly and have self-funded it via my part-time job. I work as an occupational therapist in palliative care; I'm a part of a team of healthcare providers.



We focus on comfort and quality of life for people at the end of their lives. It is meaningful work for me. I'm honoured to be able to do it. My background in occupational therapy has certainly informed the ways that I design guitars with ergonomics in mind."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I'm certainly not the only craftsperson who has really shied away from the idea of branding. But I've also had to recognise that communicating about my work via social media is a key way for it to reach people. Guitar building and my time in the shop is deeply personal for me, so I've chosen to talk about my work that way too. I love the intimacy that I have with my materials and with the shop, as well as the relationships I have between myself and my clients, so in the way that I communicate about my work, I try not to separate the maker from the material. Though it felt especially vulnerable and exposing at the beginning, I've committed to communicating not just my process of guitar building but the values that I bring into it, the depth of what I think about and feel, and the reality of my failures and successes, as well as my deep appreciation for terrible jokes and general silliness. When it comes to translating that personal side of things into visual branding, I've been very fortunate to work with two great designers: Aaron Parker, who from the beginning has worked closely with me to design the TunaTone logo and the aesthetics of my guitars, and Paras Memon who has been working on the visual identity of my work."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"When I was building the Musicmaster copy, I realised that short-scale instruments were generally made to a lesser quality. The underlying assumption behind this decision was that short-scale guitars were made for non-professional players, particularly kids and women. Once a player – assumed to be a cisgendered man – got good enough, he would move onto a full-scale heavy guitar that was part of the factory's professional series. My Teeny Tuna model aims to debunk those assumptions. The Teeny Tuna is a single-pickup standard six-string guitar, with a 24.75-inch scale length and a lively response. It weighs in at about 2.5kg."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"While I focus on building guitars that are ergonomic, until earlier this year, I hadn't had the opportunity to see whether or not my guitars actually succeeded in that design goal. In January, I was approached by a musician named Abby in Maryland. She was interested in my guitars specifically for ergonomic reasons. I decided to send my demo guitar across the continent for Abby to try in person. Receiving the testimonial, she wrote about the experience and it was probably my proudest moment as a maker."

What are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry in 2021?

"I think that the guitar-making industry faces a great ethical challenge in our role and responsibilities around climate change and what it means to use natural materials in a world that is driven by the values of extractivism. While factories of all kinds are using materials to build more and more instruments that will be massively consumed, I think there is an opportunity for players and small-scale craftspeople to interrupt that process by designing, building and playing thoughtful instruments that will last lifetimes."

What's next for TunaTone Instruments?

"I have a number of Teeny Tuna models that I look forward to building in 2021, and I'm currently working with Maximillian Heidemann in Berlin on a vibrato system for my instruments. Aaron and I are also designing the visuals for a short-scale bass at the moment."

Find out more about TunaTone Instruments at tunatoneinstruments.com

SHOP TALK

JOHN WOODLAND
MASTERY BRIDGE FOUNDER & GUITAR DESIGNER

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

There's a lot more to this present-day pioneer than bridge and vibrato manufacturing. From probing CF Martin's long-lost document archives to pondering the ethics of modern product design, the Minneapolis-based maker proves a real all-rounder

A modest, soft-spoken type whose guitar-world achievements may perhaps justify just a dash of immodesty, John Woodland does leap to his creation's defence at one point during our chat, when we mistakenly reverse the cause-and-effect that saw a simultaneous explosion in both offset-style guitars and Mastery Bridge products around the early 2010s, a trend that remains buoyant to this day. Upon our suggestion that the boom in the Jazzmaster-inspired market must've helped launch Mastery's success, Woodland politely replies, "I really think Mastery Bridge was a large part of that."

Of course it was. With the arrival of this more functional bridge in 2008 and its proliferation in the market soon after – along with the sturdier and more reliable vibrato that joined it – these groovy but otherwise glitch-prone guitars became exponentially more viable for the gigging guitarist, and everybody started cranking them out as a result. But a lot went into forming Woodland's design ethos long before the Mastery was even a glimmer in its creator's eye.

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Woodland was born in Cambridge, Minnesota in 1972, and although his parents weren't particularly musical, that drive ran deep through his extended family. "When we would visit my grandparents' home," he says, "my uncle and cousins and relatives all played guitar and banjo, and my grandma played organ. It was a given that you'd bring your guitar."

Gifted his first guitar at the age of four, Woodland was taught to play by an uncle who was well versed in traditional country music of the pre-Johnny Cash era, playing in the styles of the likes of Carl Smith, Faron Young and Roy Acuff. Self-declared a "pretty bad student," Woodland wasn't particularly drawn to academic-based careers, and wasn't sure he could actually make a living playing the instrument. But he'd been indulging a burgeoning curiosity for the thing since his early teens, when he began taking guitars apart, putting them back together, and repairing and modifying them, and that seemed to indicate a pathway into his future.

"WHAT'S PERFECT TO A CARPENTER ISN'T PERFECT TO A LUTHIER, AND WHAT'S PERFECT TO A LUTHIER ISN'T PERFECT TO A JEWELLER. YOU NEED TO SET A LEVEL OF PERFECTION THAT YOU THINK IS ACCEPTABLE"

Mastery hardware is a popular choice in the boutique world. Here, one of Woodland's bridges resides on a Novo Serus J

"My father was an electrician," he tells us. "We grew up in the country and my dad wanted me to learn a trade. I was always into design and felt there could be more done with that. So I went to Red Wing Technical College to study musical instrument design and repair when I was 19. I was probably the worst student in the class but I was the first to get hired."

On weekends while he was still studying and full-time after that, Woodland apprenticed under luthier Roger Benedict of East Bethel, Minnesota, who built guitars for Stevie Ray Vaughan, among others, before his untimely death in 1994.

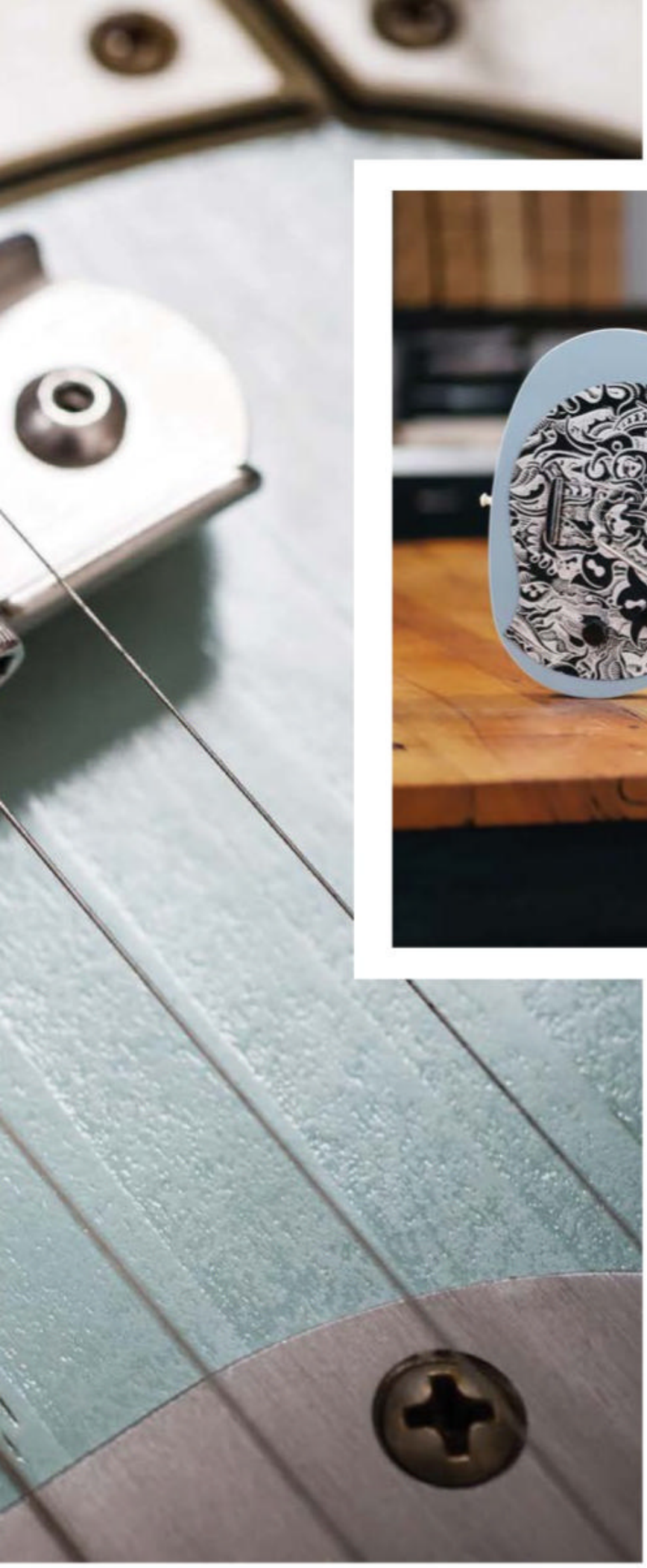
"He and I would cut down trees and make guitars from them," says Woodland. "He had done so much fret work in his life that his arm was getting bad. He taught me about how what's perfect to a carpenter isn't perfect to a luthier, and what's perfect to a luthier isn't perfect to a jeweller. He taught me that you need to set a level of perfection for yourself that you think is acceptable."

That level of precision would aid Woodland in a big way more than a decade later. But, meanwhile, there were guitars to repair and designs to explore.

TOYS IN THE ATTIC

Parallel to his passion for guitar design, Woodland has long had a fascination with the unsung pioneers of the industry. His pursuit of knowledge in this arena has significantly informed his own work, while also leading to a few discoveries that are noteworthy by any measure.

"There are people in the industry who haven't really been written about but who are extremely important to the lineage of the guitar," he says. "One of them is John Deichman, who worked at C.F. Martin. He was factory foreman, and he drafted the OM and dreadnought guitars. I think it was 2004, shortly after Mike Longworth passed away – Mike wrote the history book on Martin guitars in the late



Woodland designed this distinctive instrument, which was put together by Bilt Guitars

1960s and he was the historian of the company for a very long time – and I went there to research a line of guitars that had been made for the Oliver Ditson company in the 1910s, which turned out to be the dreadnought.

"I went in there and met Dick Boak [director of the C.F. Martin Museum and Archives before his retirement in 2018]. Dick took me up to this part of the attic in the old North Street factory that had been locked for decades. We opened it up, and there were about 400,000 documents that hadn't been read since the 1930s. There were just banker boxes full of correspondences and documents that, essentially, outlined the history of the modern American flat-top guitar as we know it: how it was designed, why it was designed, who designed it. There was so much information in there. I asked why Mike didn't ever touch on this stuff and the answer was, 'Mike didn't like to climb stairs'."

In short, Woodland had hit the jackpot. During frequent visits to C.F. Martin in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, from his base in Minneapolis where he was working in repair for Willie's Guitars, he plumbed the trove and laid out documents on big tables in the attic for a thorough perusal of the history of Martin guitar design in the early part of the 20th century.

"We started going through the old factory and the new factory and finding templates of all these guitars from the teens through the 1930s," says Woodland. "I found C.F. Martin senior's personal wallet in a box in the wood room. There was stuff spread everywhere, and there was no archive room. Chris Martin had some family stuff and some ledgers in a couple of safes.

"I showed Chris that I found all of Perry Bechtel's correspondence regarding the Orchestra Model guitar, which is what defined the flat-top: a 14-fret, solid headstock guitar with a pickguard and a belly bridge. And so, I found how and why this guitar was made in 1929. I remember looking at Chris and saying, 'This is not only the history of your company but the history of the American guitar, which defined music as we know it.'"

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

More than just a fascinating trawl through the origins of the modern American guitar, the exercise greatly informed Woodland's own work – which, as it happens, has included designing six guitars for C.F. Martin, as well as for makers such as Bilt.

"One of the main takeaways I have from that – and you can say this about a lot of US manufacturing – is that it's really shown me that brand image [in those days] was really based on the product itself. The old way of manufacturing is to make the best product you possibly can using the best materials, and let the product itself build your brand image. And I think the way that many companies approach it now is to start with an image, and have that image pyramid down to the products.

"I THINK IT WAS LIKE 15,000 GUITARS THAT I HAD REPAIRED, SO MASTERY BRIDGE WAS A SOLUTION TO A FIVE-DECADE-OLD PROBLEM, AND WAS JUST A SINGLE REPAIR FOR ME"

"One example was when Martin switched from bar fretwire to T fret wire in 1934. They were contacting the Horton-Angel Company [a wire-maker based in Massachusetts] and telling them to put a higher nickel content in the wire, because Martin used to roll bar fretwire at the factory for their guitars and they used a higher nickel content because it created a harder wire that lasted longer. So, they're corresponding with Horton-Angel and Horton-Angel is telling them, 'Yeah, we can do it, we can change the alloy content but it's going to cost more'.

"And this was at the height of the Depression, you know? This is when C.F. Martin III would use a pencil down to the eraser to save money, and Martin's like, 'We don't care, this has to be the best possible wire you can make, and we'll pay the added expense'. And nobody would've known otherwise. It's nothing that they pitched, it was all about making the best possible product you could.

"That's what's going to sell your product. It's not ads, it's not t-shirts, it's not fucking wine – all the things that companies do now. A lot of it was a perfect marriage of form and function. Traditionally, in the guitar industry, form has followed function, meaning that historically it was the purpose of the line that made it what it was, versus the art."

MASTERY OF THE CRAFT

Having discovered the extent to which form followed function historically in guitar design, that principle came into play in Woodland's creation of the Mastery Bridge. As revolutionary as that product has proven and as much as it's been taken up by the industry, he didn't see it so much as a product with a potential market, but simply as the correction of an existing design flaw.

"Mastery Bridge, for me, was like one repair," he says. "I have tried to calculate how many guitars I'd worked on up to that point. I think it was like 15,000 guitars that I had repaired, so Mastery Bridge was a solution to a five-decade-old problem, and was just a single repair for me."

Woodland designed the Mastery Bridge sitting at his workbench at Willie's Guitars after puzzling out a way to improve this perennial weak link on the Jazzmaster. He and the team had made up a few examples of the original iteration – with its characteristic dual three-string saddles, four intonation screws, and mounting posts that fit into vintage Jazzmaster thimbles – and one was sitting on his bench when a certain Nels Cline walked into the shop in April of 2008.

"Jeff Tweedy has been my good friend since the mid-90s," says Woodland. "But I didn't really know Nels because he was fairly new to the band [Wilco] at that time. But I knew he played Jazzmasters and he was really nice, so Jeff introduced us and Nels and I kind of hung out, and I showed him the bridge.

"He said, 'Yeah, sure, put it on my guitar!' He was playing the Dakota Jazz Club that night, so I went through Nels' guitar and installed it. He got the third Mastery Bridge ever made. I remember going to the show that night and kind of biting my fingernails. It was an early version, the string spacing was off and it was plain brass saddles – it was like a prototype and I had never put it in the hands of an onstage touring musician. But he really liked it and, at the end of the night, he thanked me in front of the audience and commented on the product."

What followed was much in line with any young designer's dreams: Woodland made several for Cline, who spread the word to friends Bill Frisell and the guys in Sonic Youth, who took 20 for their offsets. Elvis Costello followed, so did Tom Verlaine. "I met Tom in 2008 and gave him a bridge, and he loved it," says John. "It was a proud moment for me". And the more the Mastery Bridge became standard equipment for touring offset players, the more hobby Jazzmaster and Jaguar players saw it as a must-have component.

18+

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Collings-branded Mastery Vibrato units ready to ship out to Austin, Texas

The more the Mastery was in use, the more viable these guitars became.

"I think Mastery Bridge really made those guitars usable for people who played live," says Woodland. "Because offset guitars didn't explode after Nirvana. By making them more functional so that touring musicians could feel comfortable going out on stage without the product failing, I think the audience saw that, and the guitars continued to grow in popularity. Fender's production of those guitars was next to nothing when we started.

"I remember a Fender rep being at Willie's one day. I showed him a prototype. This was in 2008 and they had maybe two Jazzmaster models back then. And I remember the rep laughed at me and said, 'We make 400 Jazzmasters a year. You're going to do nothing with this!'"

SEMI-CIRCULAR REASONING

As we all know, the Mastery Bridge, the subsequent vibrato and a handful of Mastery products intended for use on other guitars – Telecasters, Rickenbackers, various hardtail models – have done booming business over the past decade. Not only have individual players gobbled them up as replacement parts but respected makers such as Novo, Koll, Yanuziello, Nik Huber, Kauer, Collings, Bilt, Creston, Deimel, Harvester, Suhr, Scero and many others have employed them as original equipment. But the Mastery venture isn't ending there. Woodland isn't done. Instead, he and the team have recently designed an entirely new pickup, the first run of which is just about hitting the market. Like so much of Woodland's work, however, these are not your drop-in replacements.

"They're a completely different shape," he says, "and we'll sell a routing template for builders. The covers are made of Richlite, which is paper, essentially. They have a really unique sound. I'm working with a local winder; we're doing everything here. I want Mastery Bridge to be a design-forward company. I don't want to make Tele pickups and things that everyone else is making, because… I talk to people who do NAMM and people in the industry all say, 'Oh, how was NAMM?' and it's the same regurgitated crap that's always there."

In addition to hitting the open market around the time of writing, the Mastery pickup – a modernistic, semi-circular design – has already appeared on the Nothing Guitar, designed by Woodland and manufactured by Bilt, and has so far been played by both Nils Cline and Bill Frisell.

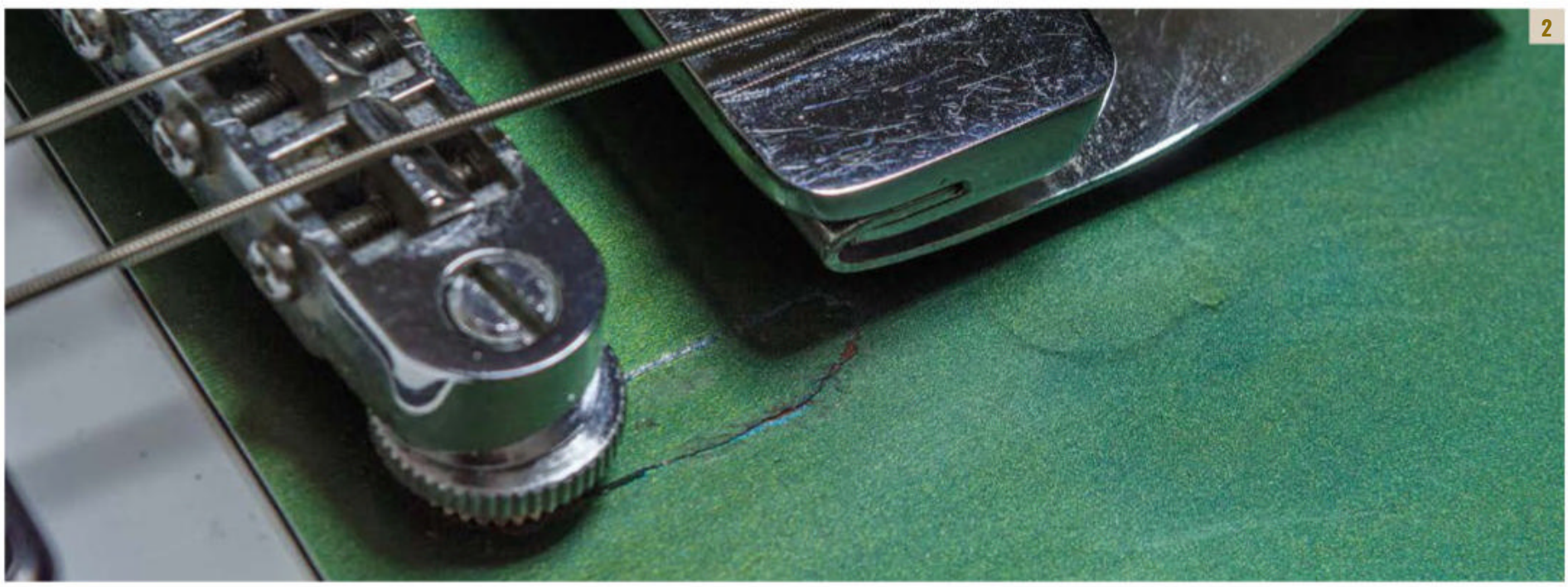
"I'm trying to make products for independent luthiers so that they can do better, and make more unique things than other large guitar manufacturers," Woodland concludes. "You have to make a product where people don't know that they need it yet, and as soon as they see it, they realise that they do. The approach to the pickups was like it was in the 1920s, when no-one had ever done this before. How would the shapes look? Take a totally different approach to the line, just to try to do something that might organically come off different."

Visit masterybridge.com for more information

1

1 A Gotoh tune-o-matic style bridge has replaced the original unit but, at first, we're not certain what bridge was fitted at the factory

2 There's some damage around the bass-side bushing and a filled hole showing through the lacquer is evidence of a stop tailpiece



2

DIY WORKSHOP

1965 GIBSON FIREBIRD RESTORATION PART ONE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

It will take some work to make this much-modified vintage 'Bird fly again. First, it needs a refret and some woodwork

Gibson manufactured original Non-Reverse Firebirds between 1965 and 1969, and the model numbers were I, III, V and VII. There was even a 12-string version but that had a different headstock shape. Only four digits of the serial number have survived on this refinished player-grade model, so before I begin working on it, in order to determine exactly what it is, I'm looking at the evidence of various bridge fittings showing through the lacquer.

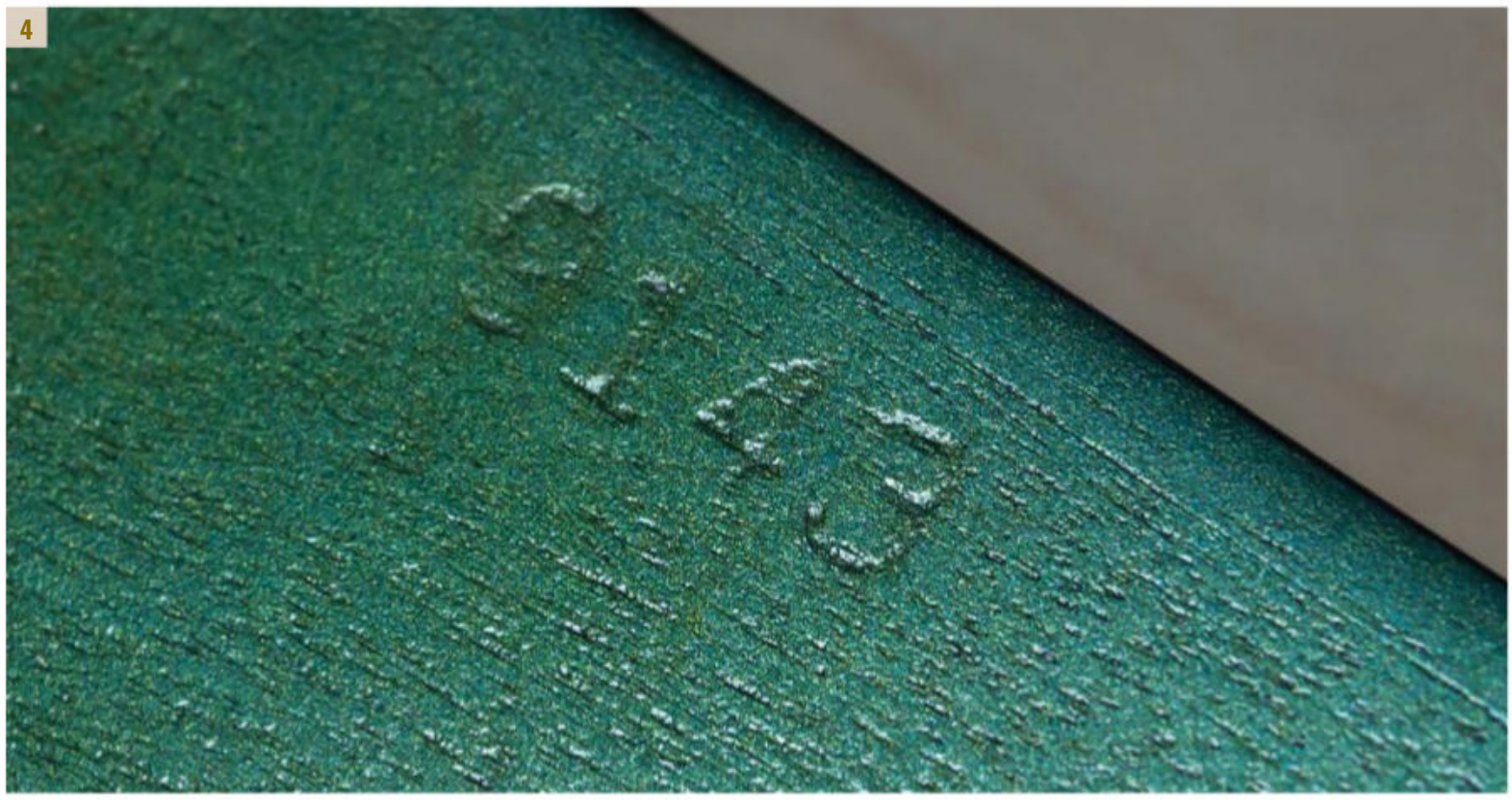
It arrived with a Gotoh tune-o-matic fitted, along with a non-original vibrato. At some point it had a stop tailpiece too but the bushing holes have since been plugged. Removing wrapover tailpieces was a common modification on 1960s Gibsons – the 'lightning bolt' wraptail provided intonation compensation designed for the wound-G string sets that pop and rock players were rapidly migrating away from.

The Gotoh bridge is mounted on bolts and bushings that are similar to wrapover and stop-tailpiece types. The treble-side bushing hole was plugged and a second bushing hole was drilled closer to the bridge pickup. The spacing between these bushing holes is too narrow for a wraptail, and no obvious evidence of a wrapover bridge having been fitted is showing through the lacquer either.

This makes it difficult to determine both the model number and the year of manufacture. But there are other clues to look for. The Firebird I and III models had two and three P-90 pickups, respectively.

3

3 The headstock was modified for three-a-side tuners and, although the holes have been plugged, the truss-rod cover still bears the scars



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4 Only four digits of the serial number remain – there's a plug where the others would have been

5 Besides the tone capacitors, all the controls and wiring are intact and the potentiometers date to 1965

But research suggests that all Non-Reverse Firebird bodies were routed to accommodate three pickups. What's more, in 1965, the cavity bottom was routed into a series of steps, making it look vaguely like a recording studio quadratic diffuser.

Somebody has knocked off the steps on this guitar, and four small recesses cut into body at the bottom of the pickup cavity indicate why: a previous owner decided to clear some space for humbuckers, and an extra switch rout and wiring channel was most likely added at the same time.

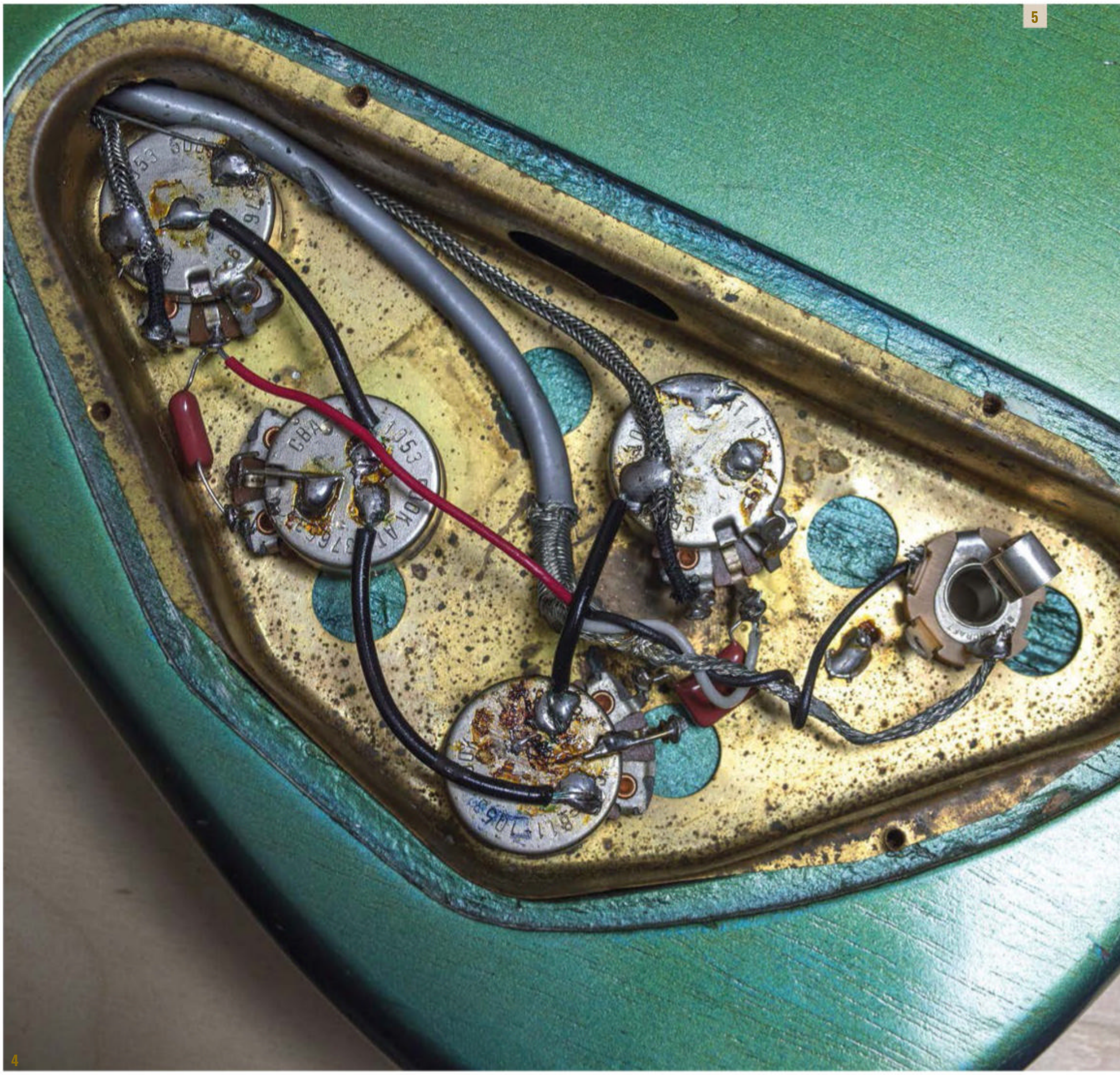
Sometime during 1966, Gibson began suspending P-90s from the pickguard and additional notches were cut on the bass side of the body cavity to accommodate the baseplate ears. The pickup cavity was also simplified to make it more of a 'swimming pool' rout. This body is routed in the earlier style, which corresponds to body-mounted soapbar P-90s.

Since there's no evidence of P-90 screw holes in the centre pickup recess, the indications are that this an early Firebird I. But it could also be a V or VII converted to P-90s. The only way to find out is to strip the finish back to the wood on the front. If there are no holes for a Maestro Vibrola cover – or if we can find plugged wraptail bushings – we can conclude that this is a Firebird I. But for that, we'll have to wait until later.

We can, however, be more confident about the year of manufacture, despite the fact that half of the serial number is missing. The Firebird's original wiring harness and potentiometers have survived intact and the potentiometer date codes all show the 39th week of 1965. This is consistent with the pickup cavity and probably means this is a first-year Non-Reverse model.

The toggle switch mounted in the pickguard probably replaced the original slider switch, although some Non-Reverse 'Birds do have factory toggle switches. The ceramic tone capacitors and original P-90s have also been lost. This guitar has a set of Monty's pickups installed instead.

The strangest modifications can be seen on the headstock. This guitar would've left the factory with six plate-mounted Kluson tuners but the headstock was later drilled to give it a three-a-side arrangement.



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Judging by the size of the plugs, die-cast tuners were once fitted. But some semblance of the guitar's original appearance has been restored with a set of six-in-line Kluson-style repros.

Flaking off the finish indicates that this guitar was originally a sunburst but right now it's Pelham Blue. Well, sort of anyway. Gibson's Pelham Blue Poly – 'poly' meaning 'metallic' in 1960s Gibson custom-colour parlance, rather than being an abbreviation for polyester or polyurethane – was a kind of acrylic paint that Gibson sprayed with clear nitrocellulose top coats. As the nitro aged and yellowed, Pelham Blue would develop a green hue.

When replicating vintage finishes, it's common practice to spray tinted clear coats. In this case though, the guitar's owner feels that the previous refinish was overdone, as it's a tad too green for his liking. In addition to that, the body surface wasn't quite levelled properly and the thinly applied lacquer has made its way into the grain all over the body and neck.

PROJECT PLAN

The main priority with this project is to respray the guitar in Pelham Blue and to make it look more like a factory finish. There will be some relic'ing too but the intention is to keep the guitar looking blue rather than its current shade of green.

Given all the work that has been done over the years on this Firebird, it's surprising that it has never been refretted. The factory frets are now too low for clean string bends and controlled vibrato, so I'll be doing a refret using vintage-style wire. During that process, I'll also be levelling the fretboard while I'm at it.

The current owner is understandably happy with the sonic performance of the Monty's P-90s but I'll be ageing the screws and covers to give them a vintage patina. The wiring is working perfectly but I'll source some vintage-style ceramic capacitors to make everything vintage-correct.

When the extra tuners were added, the truss-rod cover was cut to fit around the new tuner bushings, so I'll have to come up with a way to rectify that. Of course, I'll be reinstating a wraptail and getting into a bit of metal relic'ing too. It's no small job.

6 The toggle switch is old but we're not convinced it's original. Most Non-Reverse Firebirds had slider switches

7 One fret has been removed and solder has been applied to the adjacent fret to conduct heat and melt the glue before extraction

This isn't going to be a no-compromise restoration. Instead, I'll be taking a more pragmatic approach, using a combination of vintage and repro parts with a view to enhancing playability and the vintage vibe, but without breaking the bank.

FRETS FIRST

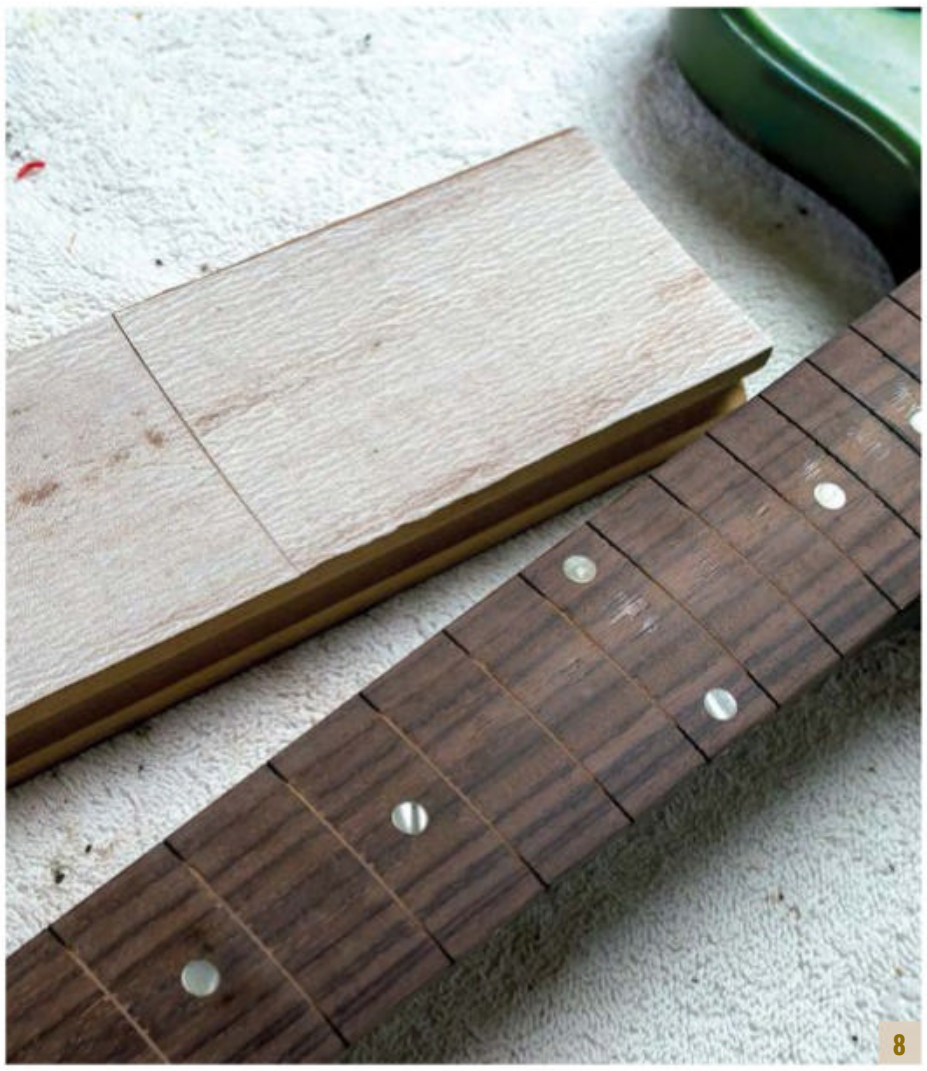
Refretting guitars involves a lot of snipping and filing to bring the ends flush with the edges of the fretboard, and it's almost impossible to achieve that without removing some of the finish. Since I'm going to be respraying this guitar anyway, it makes sense to do the refret beforehand.

Having replaced the factory frets of several vintage Gibsons in past projects, I'm certain they were installed with hide glue. The glue doesn't adhere to the fretwire but it bonds to the wood on the sides of the fret slots and sets very hard to fill any gaps and hold the wire firmly. If you try to tug the frets straight out, you'll most likely damage the fretboard.

The trick is to heat each fret with a soldering iron, and running some solder along the fret helps to transfer the heat. The glue softens quickly and begins bubbling out from under the fretwire, and pulling the fret when the glue is still soft ensures you get a cleaner extraction.

Once I finally have all the frets removed, a radius gauge determines that this fretboard has a 9.5-inch curve. After adjusting the truss-rod to make the neck as straight as possible, I remove the nut and then attach some 240-grit adhesive paper to a long radius block and level the 'board. I'm mostly concerned with getting the tops of the fret slots level. Therefore, any low spots between the frets can be left alone because they do not adversely affect playability.

Once I've verified that the 'board is level using a straight edge, I lightly hand-sand it, working my way up from 400-grit paper to 8000-grit Micro-Mesh in order to give the rosewood a smooth feel. By this point, the slots are packed with fresh sawdust and old glue residue. I used to clean slots out with a craft saw but I now use a StewMac refret saw.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8 The fretboard has a 9.5-inch radius and a radius block is used to clean and level the surface

9 After level sanding, a StewMac fret saw is used to remove sawdust and glue residue from the slots

10 The new frets are pressed in with fish glue, and the radius block is clamped over the frets to hold them in position as the glue dries

11 The guitar is strung up for testing. These fret ends have been bevelled but are not yet rounded over

The dust comes out quite easily and you can hear the crystalline glue crunching as it's dislodged.

The owner has specified StewMac medium/medium fretwire (item #0148), which is very close to vintage Gibson spec. After wiping them with isopropyl alcohol to remove any oil and dirt, I run three 24-inch lengths through my fret-bending tool to match the 'board radius. Next, to help the fretwire seat flat on the 'board, I open up the tops of the fret slots very slightly using a triangular file.

These days, I tend to press frets into fretboards rather than hammer them in, and I often use a fretting caul attached to a large G-clamp. You can buy them quite cheaply and, once you get used to using them, they're effective and easy to control.

Before fitting each fret, I run fish glue into the slots. Fish glue behaves much like hide glue but the advantage is that it stays liquid in the bottle and doesn't need to be heated. The glue dries quite slowly, so I install half of the frets and then clamp them down using a 9.5-inch radius block. After the glue has set overnight, all the frets feel solid in their slots.

Once the process has been repeated for the remaining frets, I snip off the excess and file the ends using a fret-bevelling tool. Sighting down the neck, the new frets look perfectly level. I shim the nut using some mahogany veneer and restring the guitar.

After a truss-rod tweak and a quick setup, I'm delighted to discover that these frets won't need to be levelled and crowned. I'm only able to get away with this because I took the time to level the fretboard first, and because the fretwire was a perfect match for the vintage slots.

OVER THE BRIDGE

After discussing it with the owner, we sand the front of the body to determine the bridge that was originally fitted and thereby identify the model number. He wants to restore the guitar to its original spec and his choice of bridge is dependent on the outcome. After spending an hour with an orbital sander and a flat sanding block, all is revealed.

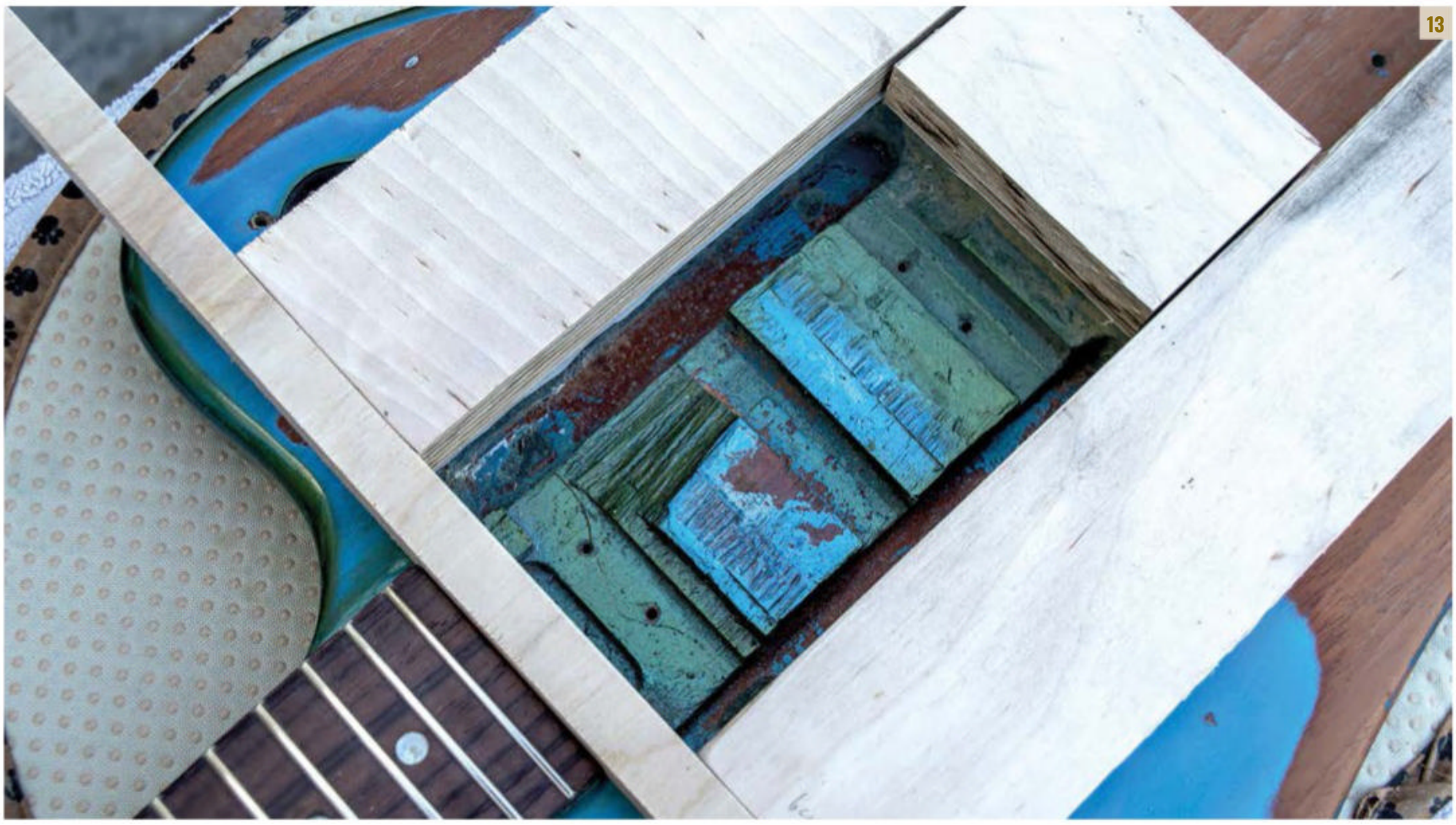
12 Removing the refinish reveals the original wraptail bushing holes with mahogany plugs, confirming that this is a Firebird I

13 The factory routs were partially removed to clear space for a pair of full-sized humbuckers

14 A router is used to level the surfaces so the original appearance can be restored

15 Mahogany blocks are cut to size, glued in place and routed to the original dimensions

12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This guitar originally had a wraptail bridge and I'm now confident that I'm restoring a 1965 Non-Reverse Firebird I. The bushing holes were filled expertly with mahogany plugs, and whoever did it achieved a perfect fit and oriented the grain to match. Plugs of this sort usually show through the finish but these were totally invisible. The same can't be said for all the other holes, however, which were plugged with a different type of wood.

During this project, I'm going to be filling the current bridge bushing holes as well as drilling out the original bushing holes in order to reinstate a wraptail bridge. However, rather than fitting a vintage 'lightning bolt' bridge, I'm instead going to source a repro with plain-G compensation. Off we go.

RIGHTING THE ROUTING

I mentioned earlier that the original stepped routing pattern in the pickup cavity was damaged to clear space for a pair of humbuckers. To finish up this part of the project, I decide to restore the original appearance in the hope that it will discourage anybody from fitting full-sized humbuckers ever again.

The guitar arrived with its P-90s bouncing around on springs but, wherever possible, I prefer to mount soapbar P-90s on wood shims. Reinstating the platforms that the P-90s sit on is the only way to achieve this. The raised section on the bridge side has lost its upper step but it's otherwise intact. I'm able to use digital callipers to determine the original size and position of the missing section. The stepped areas on the neck side and the bridge edge of the cavity are more badly damaged but the heights should be identical.

I use double-sided tape to stick plywood strips onto the body as a platform for my router, and I set the bit depth to skim the top of the bridge-side step, just enough to expose clean wood. The neck-side step and bridge step are skimmed almost level with the bottom of the cavity.

I cut mahogany blocks to size and glue onto the stumps of the original steps, then I use my router to cut them to the correct height. Two thinner strips of mahogany are cut and glued onto the new steps and, once levelled, everything looks as it should. Soon, the repairs should be invisible. We'll revisit the project at a later date. Stay tuned for the respray, relic'ing and reassembly. G

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15

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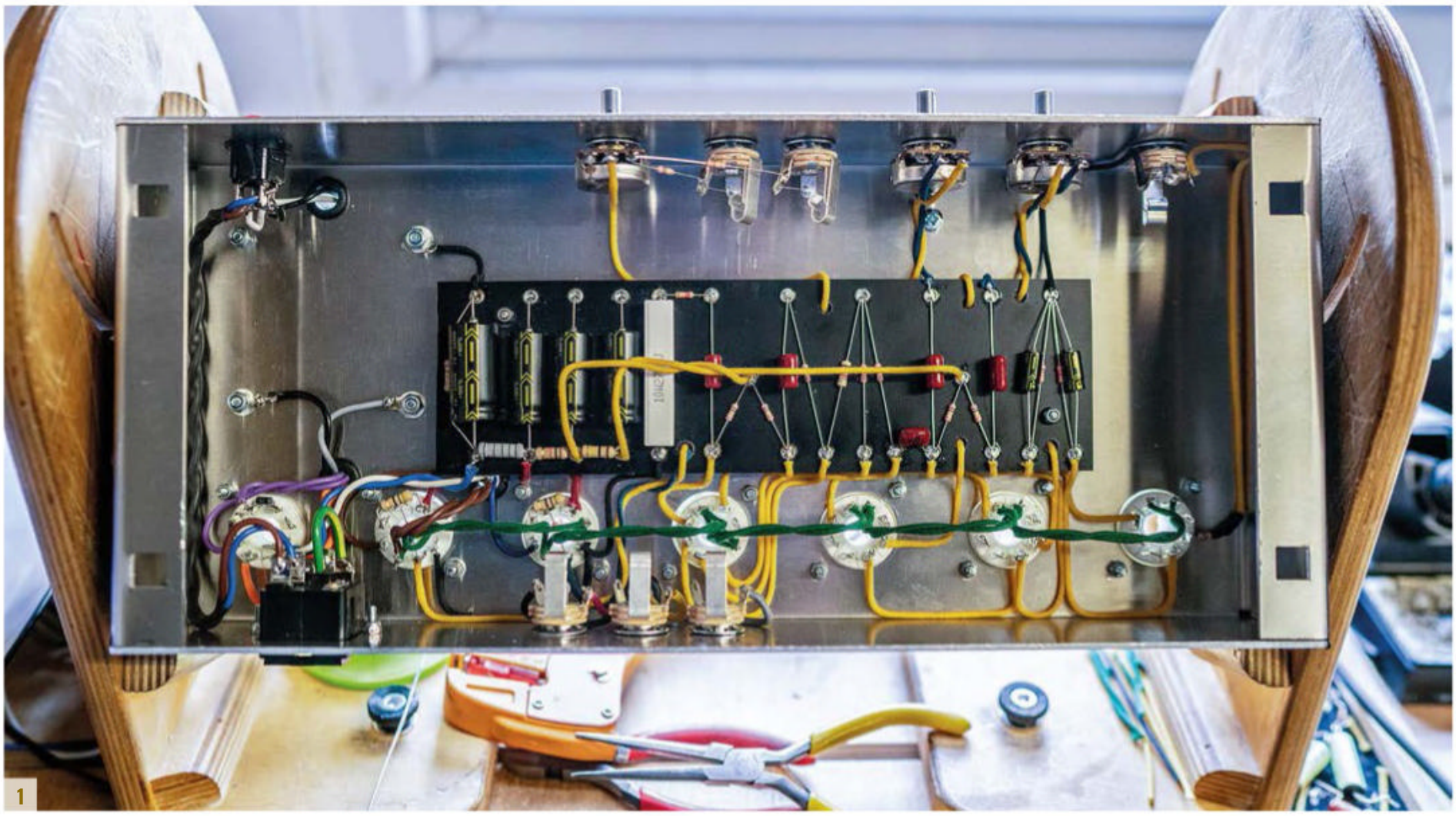
AMPLIFIER FAQ

In part three of Chris Fantana's attempt to tackle this pre-war circuit, our Gibson EH-185 clone inches closer to completion

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



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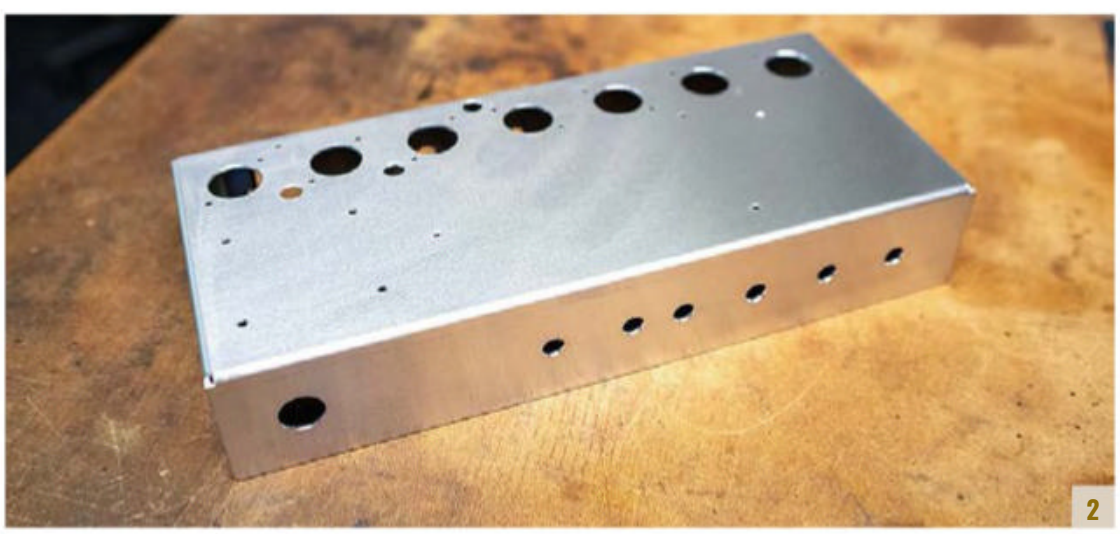

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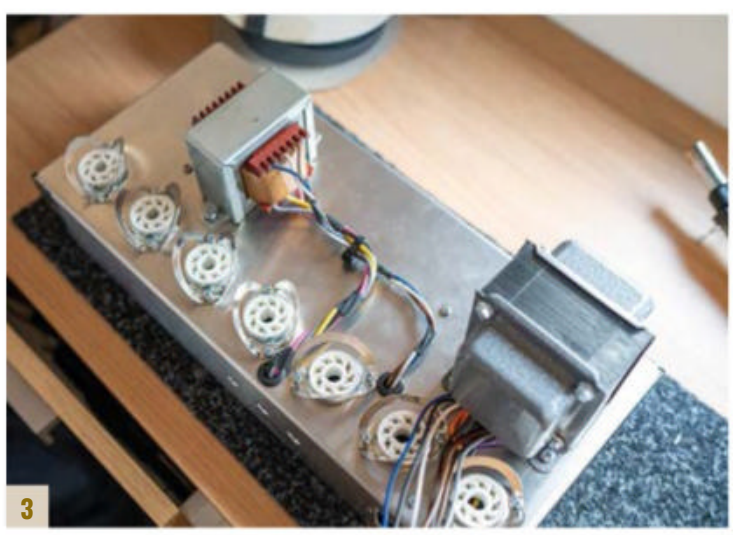

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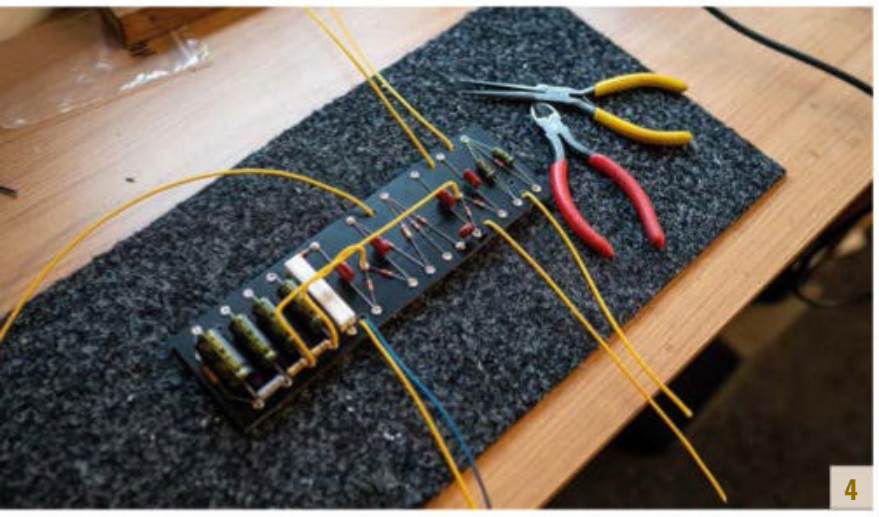
Following on from last month's instalment, we now have a chassis ready to accept all the parts for the build. The first step is to mount the valve sockets along with the retaining clips. These one-inch octal sockets from tubeampdoctor.com feature a single-piece ceramic design with excellent two-hole solder lugs that make our wire connections neat and simple. Mounted in the correct orientation with M3 hardware, they sit proudly in the chassis. Next, I install both of the transformers with M4 hardware and insert 10mm rubber grommets into the wire holes. This will prevent the metal edges rubbing through our wires.

Of course, every amp builder is different. I like to wire up as much of the chassis as I can before dropping in the board. This allows me to get to those hard-to-reach joints and ensure the neatest lead-dress possible. I begin by mounting any components to the sockets, along with any inter-socket connections, using vintage-style solid-core cloth wire. I choose to stick to Fender's original colour schemes here of yellow, brown and blue for signal wires, red for high-voltage wires and black for the ground/chassis connections. Once all these are done, I can move onto the transformer wires.



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With long runs of wire required on the outside of the chassis, keeping things tidy really is paramount. A useful trick is to use small sections of heat shrink to keep it all in order. The output transformer wires are run along the length of the chassis before forming a right angle heading towards their destination. Once inside the chassis, we can make our connections to the sockets, jacks and ground connections as required. The wires coming from the mains transformer enter the chassis almost directly below where they leave the unit itself. No messing around here, straight inside and soldered into place.

Moving onto the front panel, I install the potentiometers and input sockets and then add the mixer resistors to the guitar inputs, as well as the grid-leak resistor to the microphone side. Everything is mounted with lock washers to keep it all in place. With that done, the final wiring connections are made inside the chassis, including the mains input socket and power switch. We found a cool illuminating toggle unit that'll eliminate the need for a separate jewel light. It's also a DPST (double pole, single throw), so we can switch both the live and neutral wires at the same time. Wonderful.

FLYIN' LEADS

Back to our eyelet board. It's time to add some wires. We need wires that'll connect the board to the inputs, valve sockets, potentiometers and chassis ground. I like to run longer wires than I'll need, in case I've made any mistakes in my layout diagram. There are two wires connecting our phase-inverter and preamp circuits to the high-voltage rail; running these over the top of the board rather than underneath should make servicing easier in the future. Any ground connections tying components together are done on the underside of the board. With all of these done, we can finally mate the chassis and board together.

Sitting on 6mm standoffs and secured with M3 hardware, the FR4 board sits rigidly inside the chassis. It won't move or vibrate in sympathy with the speaker vibrations and won't flex either, which would put extra strain on the components.

DRESSING TO IMPRESS

Beginning at the bottom right-hand corner, I start working around the board in a clockwise direction. The standard of your lead dress is imperative to a low-noise amplifier and the vintage cloth wire is a dream to work with. The cloth covering has a light wax coating that, alongside the solid-core wire itself, allows for the wire to be manipulated into any position you want.

5

Running the wires up against the chassis rather than letting them flap in the breeze has both a visual and operational benefit. Straight lines with radiused right angles are the way to go when running your wires, and pay careful attention to which wires you can run parallel to each other and which you shouldn't.

The three 6SQ7 sockets and single 6N7 are wired up and look pleasing. I follow the same principles as I make my way around the board, finishing at the top right-hand corner of the chassis with the mic input. The last job before I can fire things up is to wire up the 6.3 volt heater circuit, connecting all of the valves (except the rectifier) together in parallel, and onwards to the 6.3 volt winding on the power transformer.

I use 18awg solid-core cloth green wire for this. It's rated for at least double the current that'll flow through it and, due to its thicker gauge, it's easy to manipulate into position. There are many thoughts on the best way to run your heater wiring – one day, we'll cover them. I prefer to float mine above the sockets to keep the noisy AC as far from my signal wires as I can. With this done, the chassis is finally ready for testing. Come back next month to see how it sounds.

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

1 The completed chassis, ready for testing

2 The blank chassis ready for population

3 The transformers and valve sockets are mounted

4 Adding the flying leads to the component board

5 Wiring up the preamp sockets with cloth-covered wire

VOLUME
TONE
Fender

1 With the vibrato pulled off the body, I can already see the problem here

2 Using the flashlight on my phone, the telltale signs are even more obvious

3 With the pivot plate removed, we can see the rough edges of its legs all the more clearly

TECH TALK
JAZZMASTER VIBRATO FIX

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

Vibrato making an annoying 'clunk' when the arm is depressed? Here's how to fix it

"Another day, another Jazzmaster." It's as true a maxim as any other around these parts. Even truer maybe, given the fact that, at this point in my career, I only really agree to working on offset guitars. That's a choice I made a long time ago and, while I do get the occasional Les Paul or Telecaster, my heart belongs to the underdogs of the Fender catalogue.

Today's task was tracking down a few errant wiring faults on this lovely early Fender American Vintage Jazzmaster in Blue Ice Metallic, all of which went just fine. The job was almost complete when I stumbled upon an unrelated issue the owner hadn't even mentioned: when depressed fully, the vibrato settled with a loud metallic 'clunk'. Well, that's not ideal is it?

It's entirely believable that the owner never realised this issue existed at all, given the fact that he uses the vibrato in a rather subtle manner. But the problem revealed itself the very moment I tried to use it for plunging pitch bends and icy stabs of quick warble. So what's the story here?

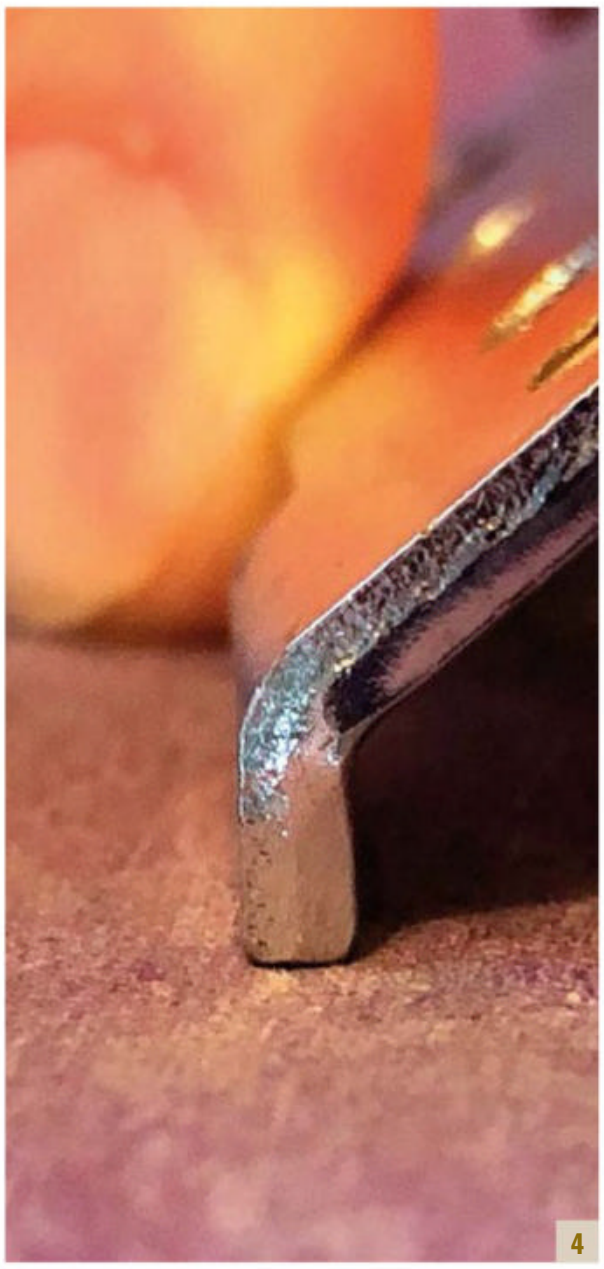
There's a crucial point of contact between the bent stationary metal pivot plate and the string anchor plate, which is the part of the vibrato that actually moves when you depress the arm. Under normal circumstances, that fit is tight and sharp, sort of like a knife edge. However, if the pivot plate is malformed or worn down in any way from years of use, the edges can become dull and the string anchor may develop a tendency to shift.

This problem certainly crops up more frequently with the more affordable import vibratos. It's an unfortunate but inevitable trade-off in quality compared with the more upmarket versions available from Fender, Mastery, and Descendant. Still, we're working with an AVRI here – and yes, it can even happen to them.

To address this issue, all that's needed is some reshaping of the two protruding legs of the anchor plate, a relatively simple procedure that anybody can do at home provided they have a screwdriver, some gritty sandpaper and a level surface on which to work. This works on every make of vibrato too, from the $20 Allparts special to the American Vintage unit.

HOW IT'S DONE

First, I remove the vibrato from the body via its six mounting screws, then dismantle the vibrato by unscrewing the spring and plunger from the tension adjustment bolt. After that, the string anchor plate slides out from its slot in the body plate and, from there, all that's left are the three bolts whose job is to secure the pivot plate to the body plate.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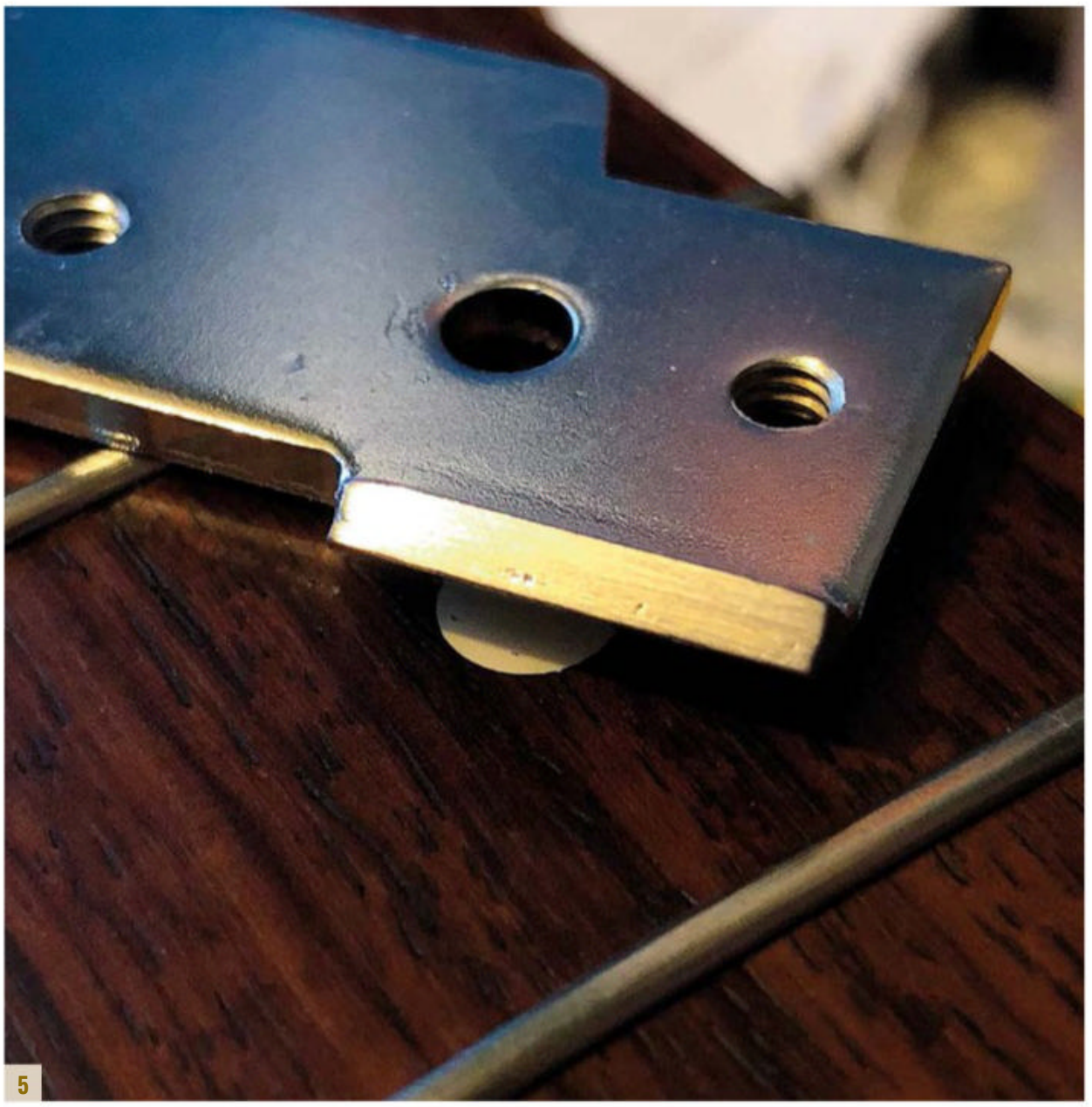
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4 It's crucial to smooth out the side of the legs that make contact with the anchor plate

5 Flat, smooth surfaces with sharp corners are what we need for a tight fit

6 With the vibrato reassembled, the pivot and anchor plate are now perfectly mated together

With the pivot plate separated, we can now see more easily how poorly formed this particular plate really is, with a sloppy surface on the ends of its legs. Close up, we can see rounded corners and what looks like an overflow from casting. This inconsistent surface means the anchor plate never seats properly, causing that mechanical clunk I mentioned earlier.

With the inspection of the pivot plate finished, we're going to grind down those rough-hewn edges for a flush, sharp surface. Here, I've placed a sheet of 120-grit sandpaper flat on my bench. Holding the plate firmly in hand, I work the piece back and forth with moderate pressure, keeping the legs relatively upright as I go.

If you have a belt sander, this can be over in moments but, by hand, the operation takes about five minutes of careful sanding, checking the surface, and sanding some more. Precision is good but the important bit is smoothing out the imperfections, not achieving perfect 90-degree angles.

Compare the before and after shots here and see for yourself the difference I've made. Upon reassembly and stringing up, that clunk is gone, while the vibrato now possesses a newfound smoothness of operation it didn't have before. I know this fix seems simple and perhaps insignificant but, as in many other areas of life, it's the finer details that really count here.

For more where this came from, follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **GARY MOORE**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

The Northern Irish bluesman's kinetic style fused blues and rock with a virtuosity that inspired scores of guitar players to follow him. Here are the fundamentals of his scorching technique

Gary Moore's long career saw the Belfast-born virtuoso immerse himself in hard rock, heavy metal, jazz fusion and more. But it's his 1990s reinvention as a bona fide bluesman on *Still Got The Blues* that shaped his legacy.

But even though Moore spent the last two decades of his tragically short life establishing himself as a genuine blues hero with Peter Green's '59 Les Paul Greeny in hand and a heart full of Albert King licks, Gary's hard-charging days in Thin Lizzy and Skid Row would occasionally come beaming through to lend his blues the serrated rock edge that fans loved.

In this lesson, we're going to look at four licks that show off some key aspects of Moore's style, from melodic slow bends to speedy pentatonic flurries. Each of these licks are in the key of A minor, and use a couple of different pentatonic shapes, as well as some natural minor notes.

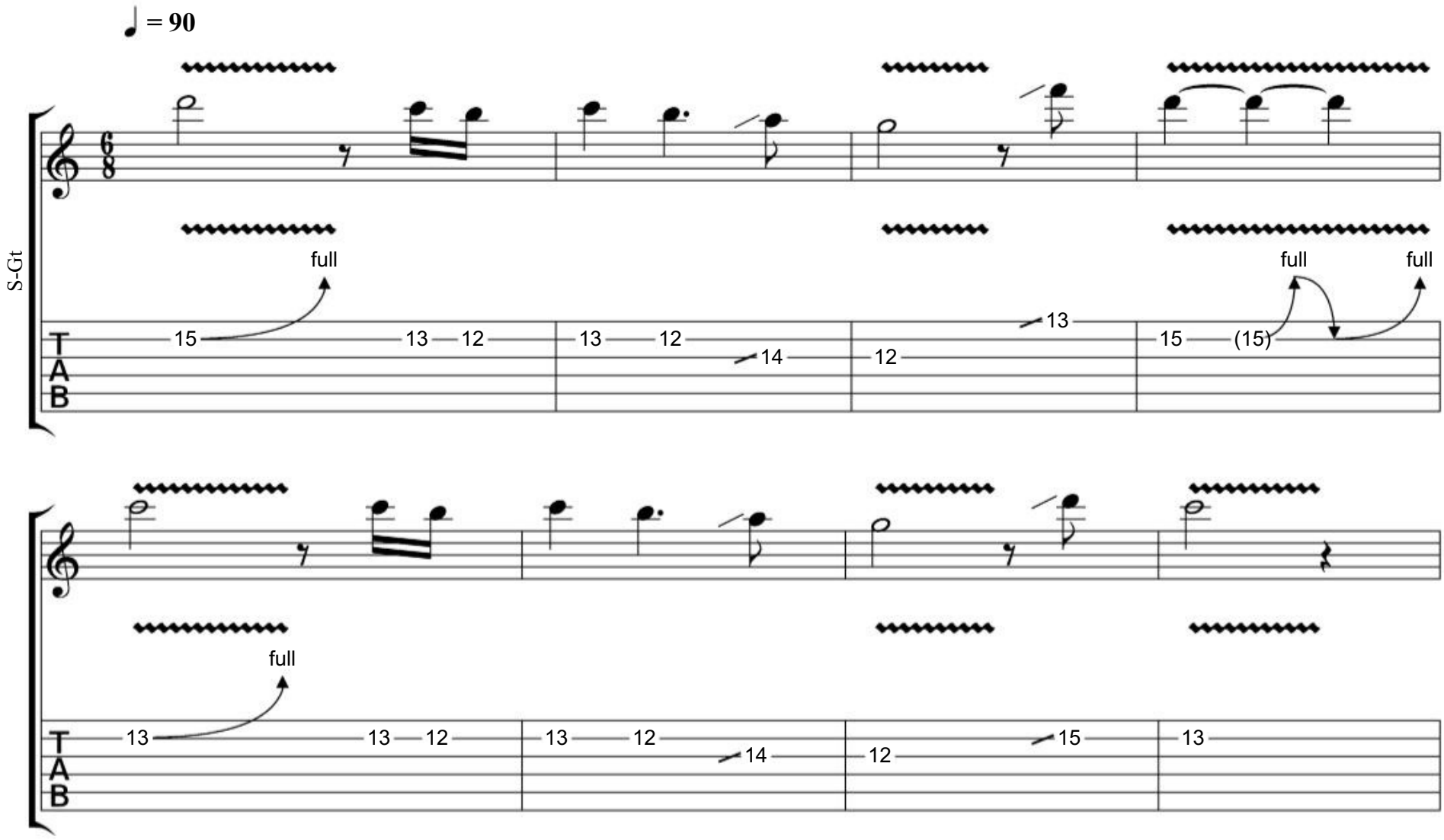
Hopefully, these licks will give you some Moore-style concepts with which you can expand your own rock and blues playing. While the examples here are all in 6/8, you could easily apply the concepts over 4/4 solos too.

© Ian Dickson / Redferns / Getty Images

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

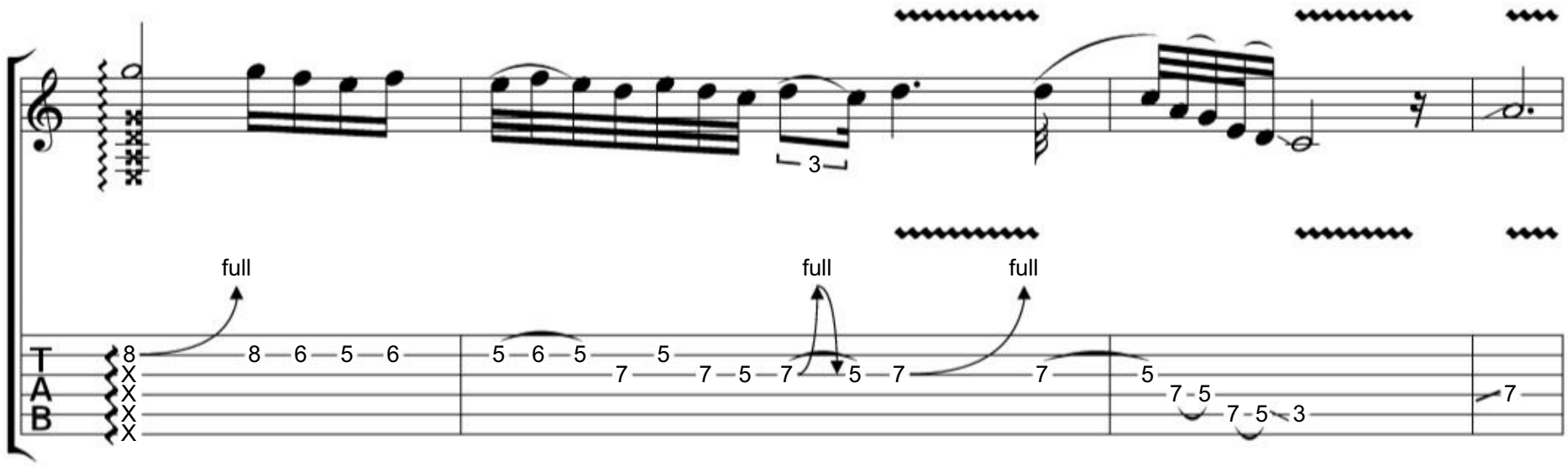
LICK 1

This eight-bar lick showcases some of Moore's melodic phrasing. Based around the fourth minor pentatonic shape in the key of A minor, the emphasis here is on the phrasing and the feel, rather than the density of the notes within each bar. The bends that begin each of the four-bar phrases should be very emotive. Moore would often rake into bends, so don't be afraid of a little sloppiness to add some feel to this.



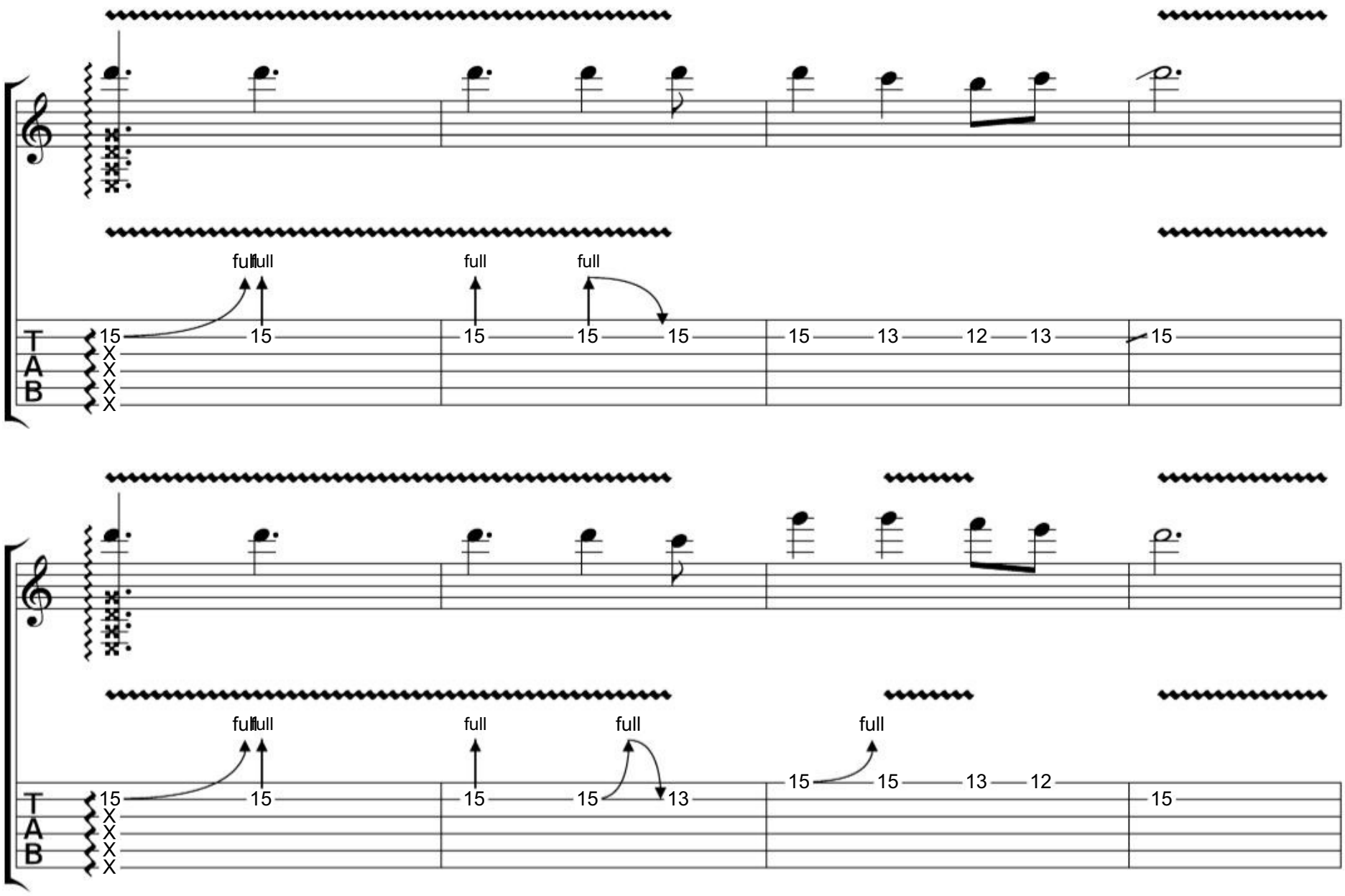
LICK 2

As his days in the rock and metal world will attest, Moore could play as fast as the best of them. This lick demonstrates his fiery technical abilities as it descends through the A natural minor scale. Rake into the initial bend for impact, and dig in to get the bite from the strings. The start of the second bar features speedy 32nd notes, so slow things down before attempting it at full speed. The lick ends with a descending flurry from the minor pentatonic.



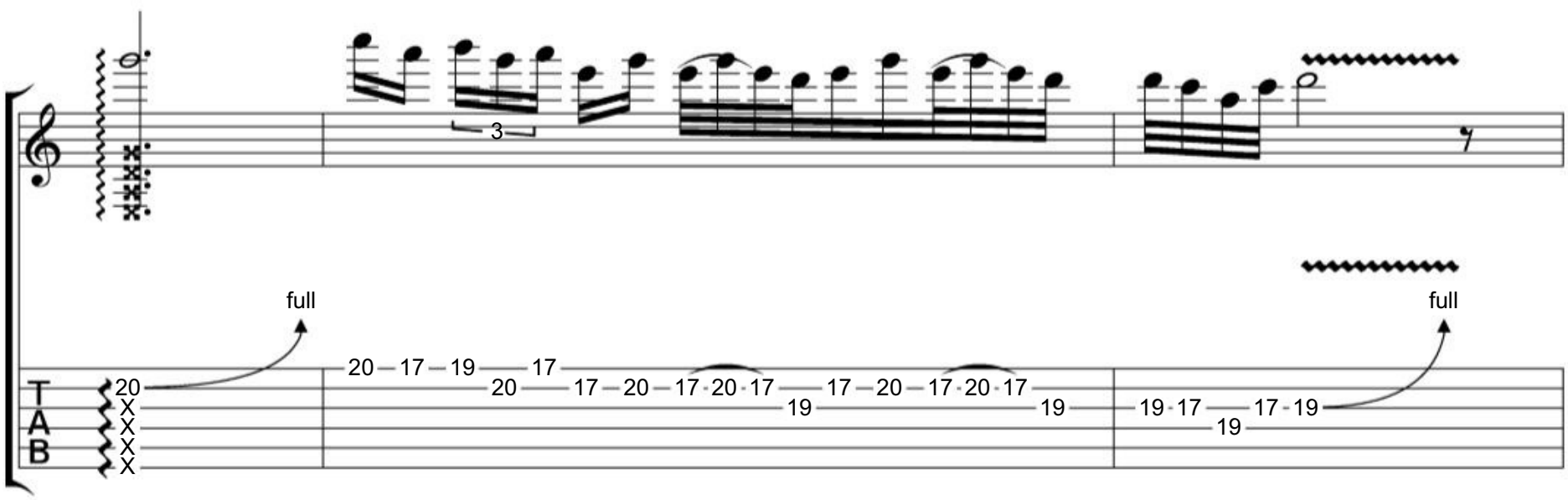
LICK 3

Here's another soaring melodic lick, based around the fourth minor pentatonic position. This example also asks you to rake into the front notes, and there are plenty of other loose moments in which you could integrate slides or string noise to reflect the way that Moore approached his playing, which saw him focusing more on capturing the feel and energy of the moment than being perfectly clean and tidy. The lick begins both times with a held repicked string bend with generous amounts of vibrato.



LICK 4

This final example ferries you to the upper echelons of the fretboard, to the first pentatonic position at the 17th fret. There are some natural minor notes thrown in here for good measure. Strap in, because this is fast, with a bar of 16th and 32nd notes that will require some slowing down before you ramp the speed back up. Rake into that first bend to get it to scream and then dig in for the descending run. Moore would often place speedy runs such as this one and Lick 2 at the end of his more mellow passages to help transition to more uptempo solo sections.



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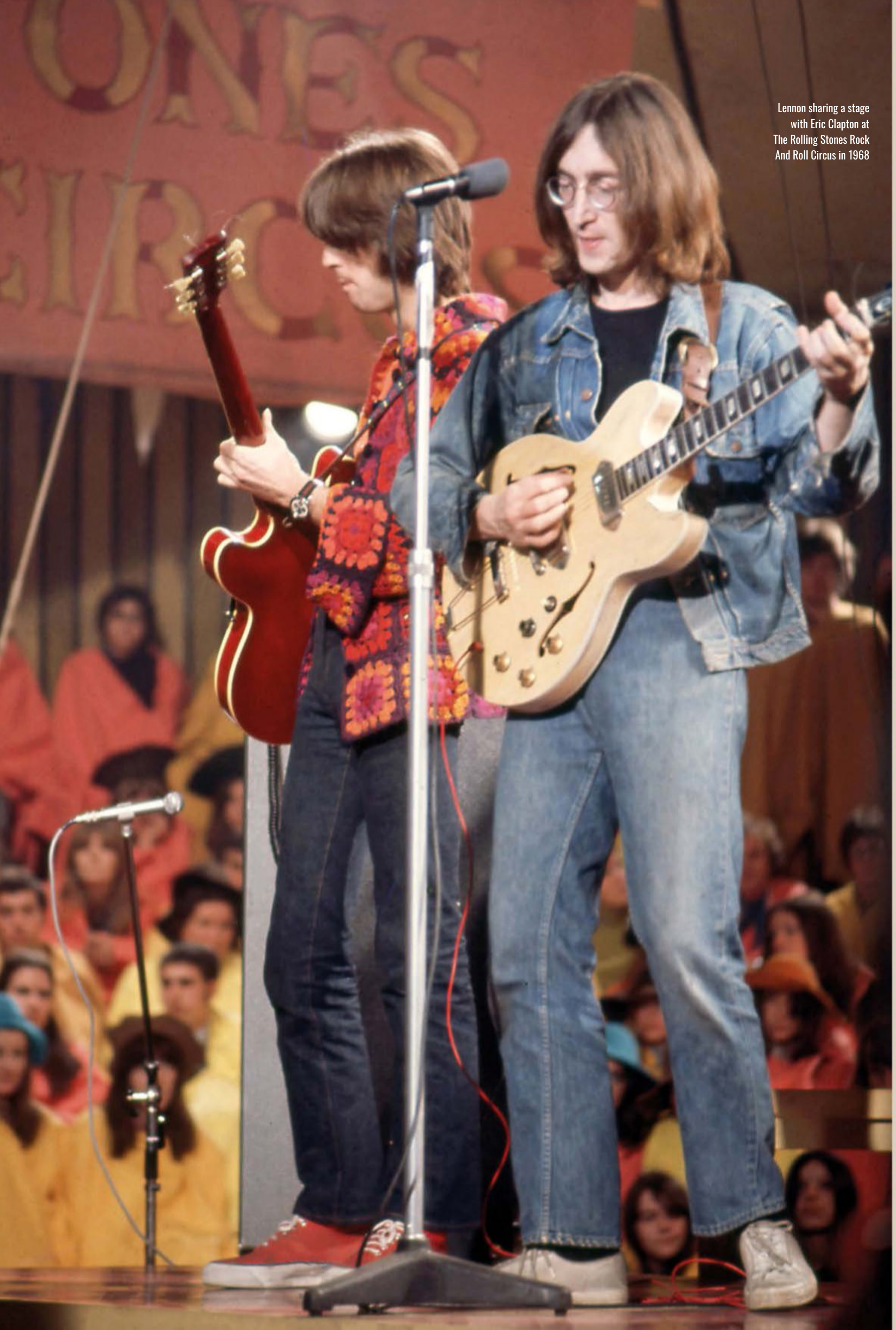


Lennon sharing a stage with Eric Clapton at The Rolling Stones Rock And Roll Circus in 1968

© Jeff Hochberg / Getty Images

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE JOHN LENNON PART II

WORDS ROD FOGG

We head into psychedelic territory in the second part of our John Lennon lesson, as we explore the chords and sequences used by a songwriting genius spreading his creative wings

Last month, we looked at the way John Lennon's rhythm guitar style and chord vocabulary provided such a consistently brilliant bedrock for The Beatles as they exploded from the bars of Hamburg into the glare of global superstardom. This time, we're examining how his choice of chords and the ways he used them evolved as the band became a more psychedelic and experimental outfit, also touching on how things continued to change as the band fragmented and he moved into his solo period.

Enjoy playing around with these chords. We'll see you next month for some more Beatles-inspired harmony.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

As The Beatles' career progressed, they began to feature more and more keyboards in their arrangements. Here, we've been inspired by the harmony implied by a keyboard intro. Play each chord starting with the bass note and then add an arpeggio. The dreamy, ethereal quality of this chord sequence comes straight from the psychedelic era and the use of slash, minor seventh and augmented chords demonstrate Lennon's ear for interesting sequences.

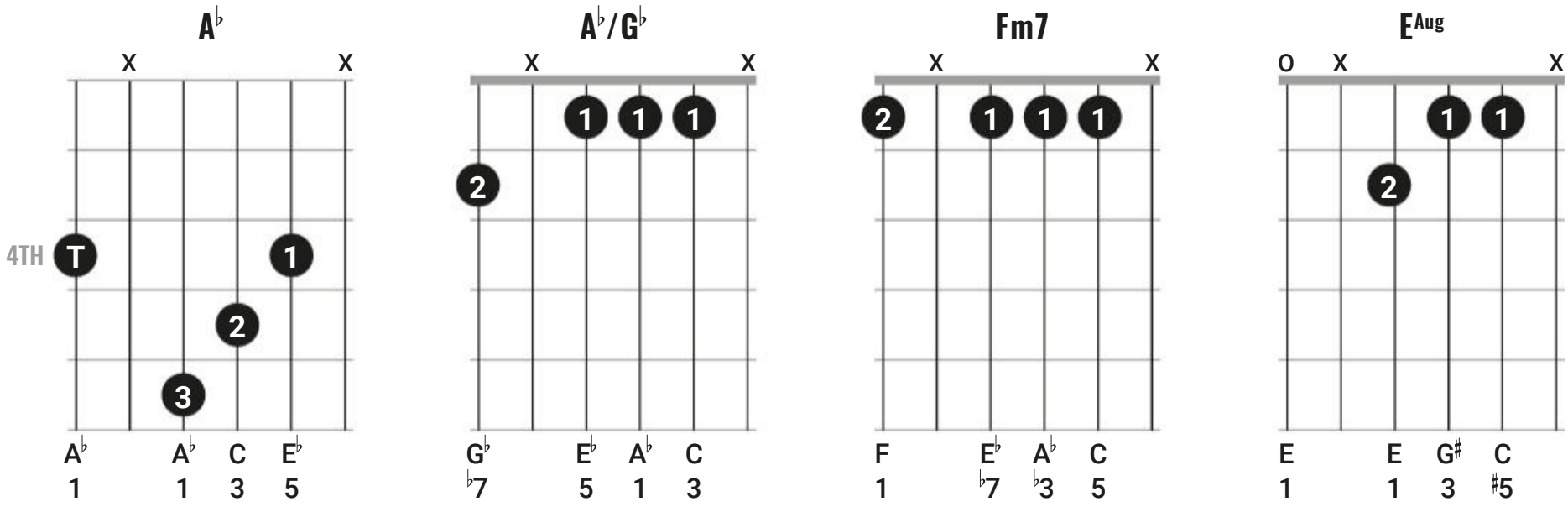


FIGURE 2

A later development in Lennon's songwriting was the use of key changes. Here, we're inspired by a guitar intro and you should try playing these chords as short stabs, releasing the pressure from the fret hand fingers after each downstroke. We're in the key of D minor but, by holding a long G chord, you can be ready to modulate (or change key) to C minor for the next section.

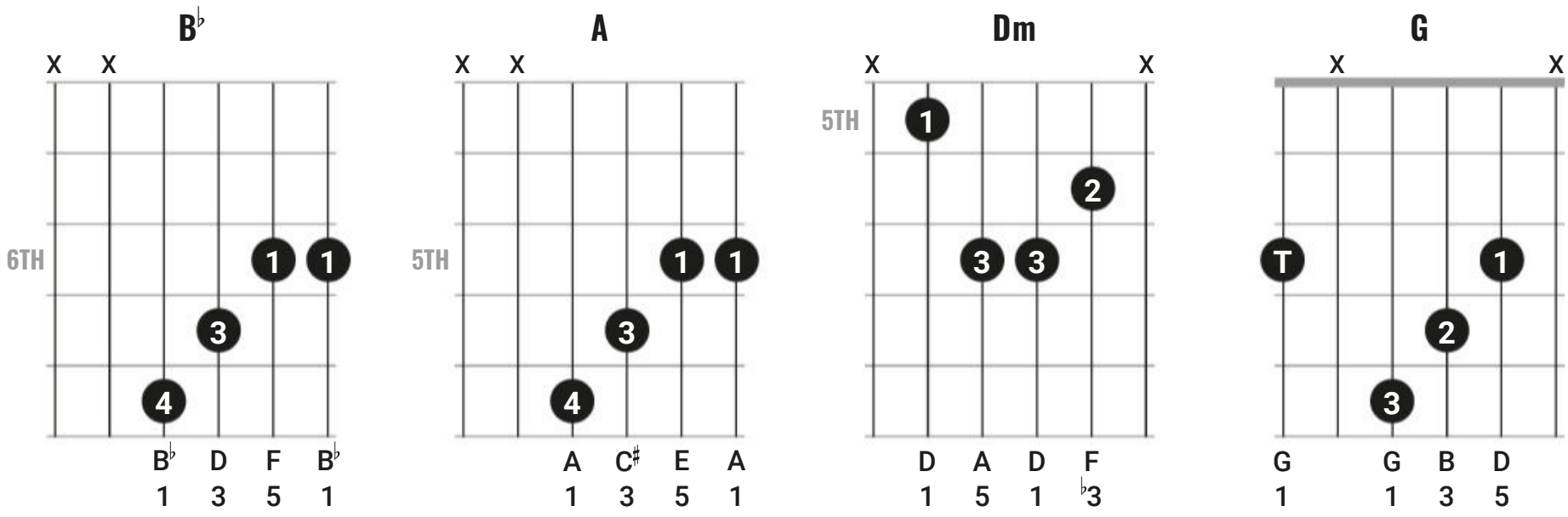


FIGURE 3

This sequence can be looped around to create a four-bar pattern. Begin with the bass note of each chord and follow it with a downstroke strum. You could also try adding a quirky waltz feel by playing it three beats to the bar and adding a second downstroke. If you find it hard to hold three strings down with your third finger for the B♭ chords, use fingers two, three and four instead.

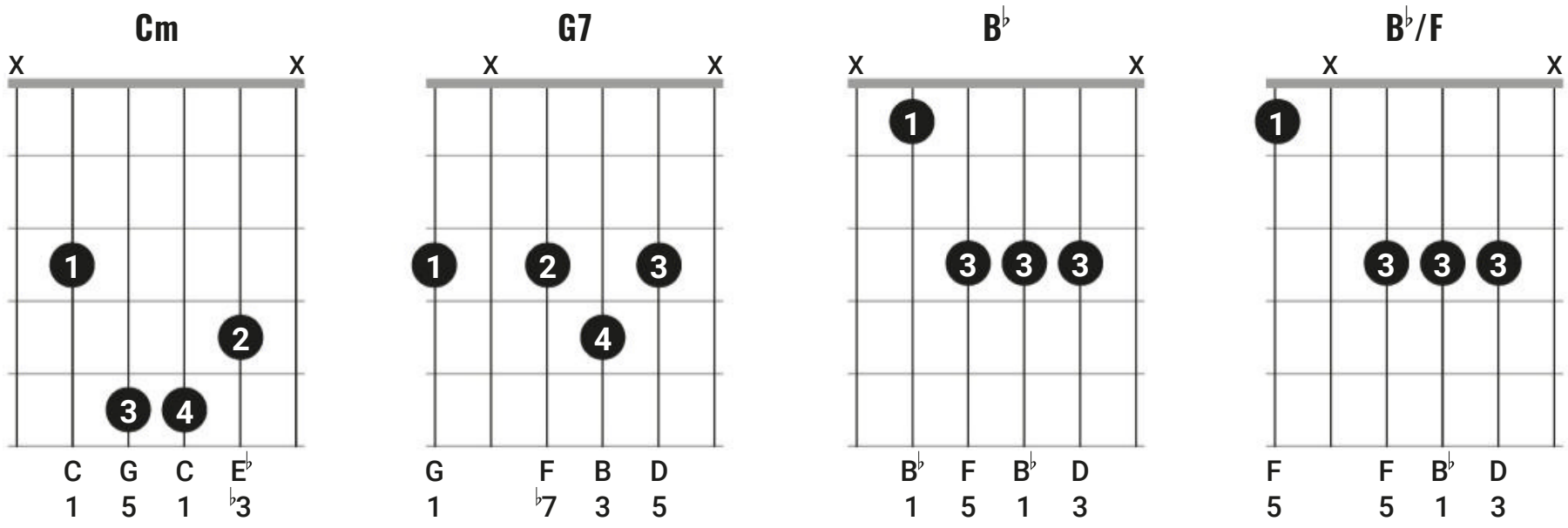
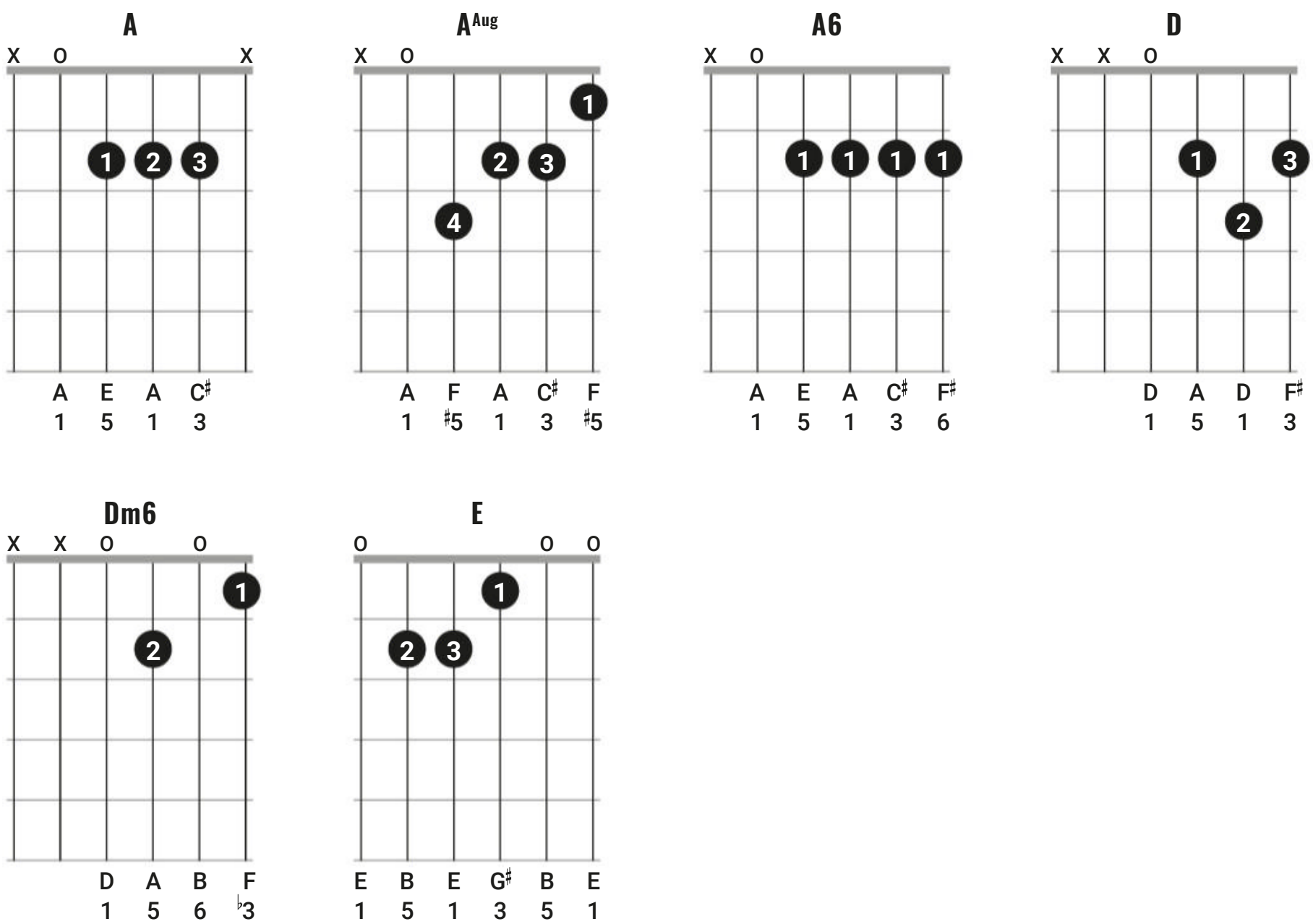


FIGURE 4

This one sounds best strummed on an acoustic and, like our first sequence, it features an augmented chord. The idea is to go back to A augmented after you play A6, giving you a four-chord sequence. Then you can move on to the D and D minor sixth chords if the fancy takes you. We are in the key of A major, and D is chord four, usually written IV. Following chord IV with IV minor is almost a Beatles cliché – you might start to recognise this characteristic sound when you hear it. The E major chord will send you back to the beginning of the sequence.



Lennon onstage at Madison Square Garden, 1974

© New York Times Co. / Larry C. Morris / Getty Image

TALKBOX

KELLINDO

Steered by his uncle, James Brown's saxophonist Maceo Parker, Kellindo Parker's musical journey has seen him collaborate with such luminaries as Janelle Monáe, Prince, and Earth, Wind & Fire. But he owes his guitar love to a monochromatic Space Ace

The moment it all started...

"When I heard my first Beatles album, I was immediately moved by everything from the chime-like guitar tones to the beautiful chord progressions of the songs as they blended them with the melodies and the beat. But it wasn't until I heard Ace Frehley of KISS that I longed to be a lead guitarist. By the way, KISS was the first rock concert that I ever attended!"

I couldn't live without my...

"My 1957 reissue Fender Stratocaster. The Stratocaster is the most versatile guitar in the world."

The one that got away...

"I've sold a few guitars that I wish I'd kept – very special guitars that had a great feel, tonality and energy. The first was my 1981 Monaco Yellow Fender Stratocaster. The second was a Jimi Hendrix Gibson Flying V hand-painted with nail polish. The third was a '57 reissue Gibson Les Paul Black Beauty. I also sold a handmade Carlo Greco guitar."

My signature model...

"I would probably design a Monaco Yellow or white Fender Stratocaster with a rosewood fretboard, a humbucking pickup at the bridge and single-coil pickups at the middle and neck positions. All the pickups would be black. Additionally, it would have a coil tap with standard controls and a five-way pickup-selector/cut switch."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"Usually, I play open chords to check if the guitar is in tune. However, recently, I've been playing chromatic and circle-of-fifth scales to warm up my fingers."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"My mom's advice was that I save for a rainy day. My uncle Maceo's advice was to always keep my axe with me. My father's advice was to always copyright my songs!"

My Spinal Tap moment...

"I had a Spinal Tap moment when we were doing a show for the North Sea Jazz Festival. It's one of my favourite festivals. The venue was massive. With about two minutes to go until showtime, I had to go to the bathroom but I went the wrong way. I ended up back in our dressing room, which felt like a mile away! With one minute left until showtime, I figured out where it was and made it back just in time for the first note of the show. But the funny thing is, this whole embarrassing experience was caught on film and broadcast live on Dutch television."

My guilty pleasure...

"My guiltiest musical pleasure is probably to sit alone listening to System of a Down or Barry Manilow."

I'm in the band...

"If I could have been in any band in history, I'd choose The Rolling Stones, for their greatness and their longevity."

I wish I was there...

"Jimi Hendrix was such an inspiration. I wish I could've attended his show at The Rainbow in London."

If I could just play one thing...

"It might take a while depending on the level of difficulty but anything that I put my ears and or eyes to I can play."

Kellindo's latest single *Long Gone* is out now on Quickfix Recordings

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